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The Erasmus Programme and political participation among young people: the cases of Spain and Italy

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.

I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

ABSTRACT

There has been a concern both in policymaking and scholarly work on youth political participation since youth voter turnout in elections showed a tendency to decline together with political party membership. Voter participation and public attitudes appear to be different among Erasmus students, with recent data showing that they had higher levels of voter turnout in European elections and significant levels of political engagement. In particular, available data shows that both in Spain and Italy, there has been a steady increase in student participation in the Erasmus Programme and higher youth voter turnout in European elections. Hence, the choice of this two Member States of the European Union (EU), which share various common characteristics, as case studies of this dissertation. Whilst the Erasmus programme role in students' lives has been previously studied, there is still research ground to explore when it comes to political participation of students who have joined the exchange programme. Thus, the present work endeavoured to understand how the Erasmus Programme and political participation of young people has evolved in Spain and Italy between de 1980s until 2019, and the significance of such evolution.

This dissertation starts by going through the history and development of the Erasmus Programme from its origins to 2019. It then provides the description of the evolution of the international exchange programme in Spain and Italy followed by how youth political participation has evolved in both countries. Finally, Chapter Four provides a comparative analysis of Spain and Italy regarding the Erasmus Programme and youth political participation.

This study outlines that the global financial crisis might have pushed young people to political action expressed through protest movements. Indeed, youth in general has shown a tendency towards non-institutionalized forms of political participation and higher levels of abstention in elections. As for Erasmus students, they tend to have positive associations with the EU, higher interest in EU elections and higher voter turnout in them. Nevertheless, they do still engage in other forms of political participation, which are less institutionalized. Overall, young people have been searching for a different direction in politics and this is also noticeable in Erasmus participants who seek for more rights as EU citizens.

Keywords: Erasmus; Italy; Spain; Youth; political participation; Economic crisis

RESUMO ANALÍTICO

Tem havido uma preocupação tanto na elaboração de políticas como na elaboração de trabalhos académicos sobre a participação política dos jovens desde que a afluência às urnas dos mesmos nas eleições registou uma tendência decrescente, juntamente com a filiação em partidos políticos. A participação eleitoral e as atitudes públicas parecem ser diferentes entre os estudantes Erasmus, com dados recentes a demonstrar que estes tiveram níveis mais elevados de participação eleitoral nas eleições europeias e um envolvimento político mais significativo. Em particular, os dados disponíveis mostram que, tanto em Espanha como em Itália, tem havido um consistente aumento da participação dos estudantes no Programa Erasmus e uma maior afluência às urnas por parte destes jovens nas eleições europeias. Daqui resultou a escolha destes dois Estados-Membros da União Europeia (UE), que partilham várias características comuns, como estudos de caso desta dissertação. Embora o papel do programa Erasmus na vida dos estudantes tenha sido previamente estudado, ainda há muito para explorar no que toca à participação política dos estudantes que aderiram ao programa de intercâmbio. Assim, o presente trabalho procurou compreender como o Programa Erasmus e a participação política dos jovens evoluíram em Espanha e Itália entre 1980 e 2019, e que significado esta evolução tem.

Esta dissertação começa por percorrer a história e o desenvolvimento do Programa Erasmus desde a sua origem até 2019. Em seguida, fornece a descrição da evolução do programa de intercâmbio internacional em Espanha e Itália, e de como tem sido a participação política dos jovens em ambos os países. Por fim, o Capítulo Quatro fornece uma análise comparativa entre Espanha e Itália no que diz respeito ao Programa Erasmus e à participação política dos jovens.

Este estudo demonstra que a crise financeira global poderá ter pressionado os jovens na direção de uma ação política expressa através de movimentos de protesto. De facto, os jovens, em geral, têm demonstrado uma tendência para formas não institucionalizadas de participação política e níveis mais elevados de abstenção nas eleições. Quanto aos estudantes Erasmus, estes tendem a ter associações positivas com a UE, maior interesse nas eleições da UE e maior afluência às urnas. Ainda assim, dedicam-se também a outras formas menos institucionalizadas de participação política. Em geral, os jovens têm procurado uma direção diferente na política e isto também se pode verificar nos participantes Erasmus que procuram mais direitos como cidadãos da UE.

Palavras-chave: Erasmus; Itália; Espanha; Jovens; participação política; crise económica

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ABBREVIATIONS

EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
NEET	“Not in education, employment or training”
ESN	Erasmus Student Network
EVA	Erasmus Voting Assessment
EP	European Parliament
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
ECJ	Court of Justice of the European Communities
JSP	Joint Study Programmes
AEGEE	Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l’Europ
ECU	European Currency Unit
ECTS	European Community Course Credit Transfer System
NARIC	Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres
TEU	Treaty of the European Union
ICT	information and communication technologies
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme
ET	strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training
IT	Information technology
EPALE	Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe
EMJMD	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees
IPA	Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance
DCI	Development Cooperation Instruments

ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
PI	Partnership instrument
EDF	European Development Fund
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
NRP	National Reference Points
EMU	European Monetary Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CEOE	Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales
IMF	International Monetary Fund
USA	United States of America
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque terrorist group)
PNV	Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque National Party)
GAL	Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish socialist party)
PP	Partido Popular (Spanish conservative party)
PRR	populism radical right
HE	Higher Education
EIS	Erasmus Impact Study
ECB	European Central Bank
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
SIS	Schengen Information System
EMAPA	EU Migration, Asylum and Protection Agency
FI	Forza Italia
AN	Alleanza Nazionale
UDC	Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro

LN	Lega Nord
FSM	Five Star Movement
DC	Democrazia Cristiana
NGO	non-governmental organisation

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 1980s, Europe was going through a period characterized by economic stagnation and a low voter turnout in the direct elections to the European Parliament (European Parliament: Facts and Figures, 2014). During this time, there was lack of support among young people for the European Communities (Feyen, 2013). Thus, in June 1985, in the Milan European Council, it was established that further development of the European project could only be achieved with greater involvement of young people. To accomplish this, the Adonnino Committee was created to present proposals to tackle the issues connected to European youth. This Committee early on decided that action should be taken to encourage exchanges of young people between Member States (Report by the Committee on a People's Europe submitted to the Milan European Council (Milan, 28 and 29 June 1985), 1985). At this moment, the groundwork is made to allow the launch of the Erasmus Programme two years later (Feyen, 2013).

As Feyen noted, in 1985, the European Commission (EC) publishes its proposal on the Erasmus Programme, which is soon supported by other European institutions, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee. After almost a year of negotiation, a proposal was presented to the Ministers of Education who adopted articles 128 and 235 concerning the Erasmus Programme in 1986. Finally, on the 14th of May 1987 in Brussels, the twelve Education Ministers within the Council agreed on adopting the Erasmus Programme, which went into effect on the 1st of July 1987. In 2017, the Erasmus Programme celebrated its 30th anniversary, having welcomed before its most recent version the Erasmus+, which was active between 2014 and 2020 (European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2019). With its developments and larger scope, the Erasmus Programme became a concept that spread outside European borders. With this, Erasmus Mundus was born, a programme that promotes mobility of individuals and focuses on the increase of quality European universities and fosters the values of equity, human rights, and social justice (Lloyd, 2013). In our chosen timeline (1980's to 2019) we were able to analyse the history of the Erasmus Programme until the present, understanding how it began and its different expansions until Erasmus+ and its role in the education field. By opting for this timeline, we were able to have an overview of the origins of the Erasmus Programme until 2019, understanding its evolution and expansion to different fields. With this timeline, we were also able to go through the political, social, and economic development in Spain and Italy, particularly the impact the period post-2008 crisis had in youth public attitudes and political participation in both countries. By looking

over the background of young people in Spain and Italy, we could analyse the possible influence of this on their public attitudes and political participation.

As the Erasmus Programme developed and served more and more participants, Member States such as Spain and Italy faced the consequences of the economic crisis, which erupted in 2008 and led both countries governments to apply stiff measures to tackle it (Pirro and Kessel, 2018). In Italy, the crisis represented the final step of a decline for the country, which began after the recession 1992-93 (Tridico, 2012). As for Spain, the country enjoyed in the 1990s until 2007 an incredible economic growth, with an unemployment rate which kept lowering, but this 'Golden Decade' of the Spanish economy came to an end with the international financial crisis (Élteto, 2011). By 2010, the Spanish government had to change its fiscal policy to cope with the crisis, at the same time, international markets lost their confidence in Spain and other Southern European countries (ibid.).

During this time the NEET ("Not in education, employment or training") became in 2011 20% of Spanish citizens between the ages of 15 and 29 belonged to it. Even those with higher education increased their numbers in this generational group by 69% (Jover, Belando-Montoro, and Guío, 2014). The crisis also showed its impact on youth employment in Italy, since 2011, more than 40% of young workers have spent more than one year unemployed (Dolado J. J., 2015). Moreover, the financial and economic crisis provoked a change in the way Italians viewed Europe, breaking the trust they had in Europe as a source of prosperity and economic growth (Mauro, 2014). In addition to this, political parties were unable to represent their voters fully. This became evident after the start of the 2008 crisis, in which governments had to satisfy voters' demands and their EU partners, EU institutions and international financial organizations (Bosco and Verney, 2012). By May 2011, a social movement known as 15-M started in Spain, which protested the political elites, the economic situation and how Spanish democracy operated (Puig, 2011). While in Italy, the political scene was of instability in the national party system due to corruption and scandals, this also came with an increase of power of populist forces, which started questioning the European project (Hopkin, 2012).

Looking from a young people's perspective, when it comes to the EU, they perceive its values and institutions as distant from them, which puts at stake attempts to increase civic and political engagement (Villano and Bertocchi, 2014). This is particularly relevant when considering that public attitudes over mass political behaviour have been responsible for shaping and constructing European integration (Gabel, 1998). Nonetheless, it should be noted that both in Italy

and Spain there has been a steady increase in student participation in the Erasmus Programme (Figure 2 and Figure 3), which has also come with a higher voter turnout when analysing the available data of the youth (18 to 24 years old) in Spain and Italy in European elections (Figure 8). At this point, we should highlight that youth political participation has shown to express itself in different ways, not just through the ballot, non-participation in elections could have multiple interpretations (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003). Hence, political participation can entail all political activities in which a citizen can take part to try to influence decision-making (Grasso, 2018).

Moreover, it should be considered that politics can involve both formal participation and social empowerment (Favell, 2010). Thus, we will attempt to analyse the evolution of the Erasmus Programme during their studies and political participation of young people, in European elections, behind a background marked by high youth unemployment and the rise of populist movements. To do so, we will base our work on the following research question: how the Erasmus Programme and political participation of young people have evolved in Spain and Italy, and what is the significance of this?

Relevance of the research

On the 14th of May 1987 in Brussels, the twelve Education Ministers within the Council agreed on the adoption of the Erasmus Programme, which came into effect on the 1st of July 1987. This was considered a milestone for young people and the European Community (Feyen, 2013). The first generation of programmes had the goal to boost European features in learning prospects. At the start of the 2000s, there was a greater investment in different fields, such as lifelong learning and adult education (Ertl, 2003). By 2017 on the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus Programme, its most recent version was introduced, Erasmus+, which focused on equity, prosperity and social inclusion which went beyond the European borders (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2019).

As Erasmus evolved to become increasingly seen as an essential investment in the future, as it was pointed by the former President of the EC Jean-Claude Juncker, the crisis of 2008 echoed throughout Europe (30 years of 'Erasmus' exchanges abroad: Commission launches mobile application to mark anniversary, 2017). The recession post-2008 was characterised by high unemployment rates in Spain, which mostly affected the middle class who either lost their job or saw a considerable reduction of their income, this created a climate of indignation also connected

to the corruption which was exposed in politics and the financial system (Zarzalejos, 2016). As for Italy, the crisis of 2008 represented the last moment of a long decline which had begun in the start of the 1990s (Tridico, 2012). The Italian economy suffered from the crisis and public confidence in the effectiveness of the European common currency was shaken (Jones, 2009).

The climate of crisis and its repercussions lead to social unrest and protests in Spain in 2011, seen as the response of young people to what was happening in their country (Jover, Belando-Montoro, and Guío, 2014). Indeed, Spanish youth showed outrage and distrust towards their democratic institutions; this translated in the formation of the 15-M movement as a path to search for a political alternative (ibid.). A similar trend was felt in Italy, where the negative economic performance endured for an extended period of time, this compromised the trust in politics and parties; consequently, there was cabinet instability (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2014). Abstention was used during this period as an expression of discontent with the whole political system, but many young people who were also dissatisfied preferred to cast their ballots for radical insurgent parties such as the Five-Star Movement (ibid.). It should be acknowledged that the crisis might have been in itself a catalyser for youth political action, mainly through protest movements, yet they appear to attract a small number of participants, who tend to be ignored by mainstream political parties and politicians as they are unlikely to vote (Grasso, 2018).

Voter participation and public attitudes appear to be different among Erasmus students. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Survey 2019 showed that they had higher levels of voter turnout in European elections and significant levels of political engagement through activities such as public debates and demonstrations (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Taking this context as a whole, from the evolution of the Erasmus Programme, the crisis in Southern Europe and youth voter participation and attitudes, we should attempt to understand the significance of their evolution, if there have been substantial changes and what could be the consequences of these occurrences. Through an analytical and in-depth reading of these events, we might be able to take on a greater reflection on the Erasmus Programme and youth political engagement in society and what role they have played in the construction of the European project.

Objectives

The main purpose of the present investigation is to understand the significance of how the Erasmus Programme and political participation of young people have evolved in Spain and Italy. To study the evolution of the Erasmus Programme, we based our work on primary sources such

as the Eurobarometer and Erasmus Student Network studies together with scholarly works on the subject. Thus, this research attempted to comprehend the evolution of the Erasmus Programme, an exchange programme which from its start has stimulated the mobility of students within the European Union (EU) (Proposal for a Council Decision adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus), 1986); and on current days it has extended itself from beyond European borders, being now a concept known throughout the world (Pinto, et al., 2018). The latest version of the Programme, named Erasmus+, counted with an overall budget of 14.774 billion euros and already between 2012-2013 new records were achieved in terms of people who joined Erasmus, there were a total of 268 143 students benefitting from Erasmus grants to go abroad to study and train (Erasmus 2012-13: the figures explained, 2014).

Both Italy and Spain have seen a positive evolution regarding incoming and outgoing participants in the Erasmus Programme from the academic year 2004/2005 to 2017 (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Spanish universities have been investing in their internationalisation, boosting support for outgoing students and increasing worldwide attractiveness of Spanish higher education institutions (Valle and Garrido, Movilidad de estudandiantes universitarios: es España atractivo para los estudiantes Erasmus?, 2009). In the Italian case, the country has proven to be one of the major players in intra-EU student mobility (Pietro and Page, 2008). However, its higher education system is one of the most traditional in Europe, and there have been some incentives to increase its international facet (Lindberg, 2009). Even though there is academic research and output on the origins of the Erasmus Programme, accounting of its participants was only found from the academic year of 2004/2005, limiting our analysis in some aspects.

Considering youth political participation, the academic work has shown that the turnout in elections has declined together with political party memberships, being these the most formal and institutionalized forms of participation (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003). The reasons for this can vary, from the perceived inability of political representatives to address issues which concern the youngest sector of the population, from the youth not being able to see what formal politics can offer them, choosing other forms of engagement, such as demonstrations (ibid.) instead. This trend of non-institutionalized ways of political participation was observed in Spain and Italy; student movements arose during the time of economic crisis (2008 and 2010) around the concepts of precarity, youth and anti-austerity discourse (Zamponi and González, 2016). In general, young people have been disappointed with the traditional forms of political participation. There have been debates and concerns led both by scholars and policymakers on youth's apathetic

attitudes on their engagement in the established political system (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010). Overall youth voter turnout in Spain and Italy was only found for 2009, 2014 and 2019 in the Eurobarometer (Figure 8). Until those years, there was no breakdown of voters' profile (age, gender, profession, etc.).

When approaching specifically youth political participation and public attitudes of Erasmus students from Spain and Italy, we were only able to incorporate in this investigation mainly two studies, the 'Erasmus Voting Assessment' (EVA) from 2014 and the ESN Survey 2019, which have both showed how Erasmus participants have greater intentions to vote in European elections and do so. In fact, during the 2014 European elections, 81% of EVA respondents who had completed their stay abroad admitted in voting on those elections (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014). In the following European elections, students who had participated in an EU funded exchange programme gave higher importance to EU elections (60,69%), had greater intentions to vote in them (76,18%) and had a greater turnout in the European elections of 2019 (71,20%) (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019).

Although there was a lack of data from primary sources such as the Eurobarometer and ESN Surveys, this last studies only in 2019 dwelled in political participation and engagement, the fundamental objectives of the present investigation were still carried out, since we were able to understand the significance of both the evolution of the Erasmus Programme in general and in Spain and Italy, as well as the changes in youth political engagement in Spain and Italy and what role education and mainly the Erasmus Programme has played in this.

Literature Review

Public attitudes can shape the process of European integration, this became most evident during the Danish 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, but they can also cast influence in EU politics through lobbying, public protests, and elections (Gabel, 1998). Indeed, two mechanisms have been responsible for building up a dynamic European public sphere, the increased communication within European political institutions or an increasing institutional environments, and the increase in people's attention and awareness of the European political communication (Trenz and Eder, 2004). Through the Maastricht Treaty, public legitimacy was intended to become an integral part of European strength, compelling institutional and political actors to consider in their strategies and decisions the public's opinion and possible reactions. In case the public remains indifferent to European political actors' actions, it is a part of their role to seek how to

engage the public in their activities, allowing for multilevel governance. According to Trenz and Eder "This moves the social learning of an elite community toward the collective learning of institutions and their counterparts in civil society." (ibid.: 2004, p.16). Thus, the deepening of democracy in the EU could be a process, which unfolds together with greater integration and it should be noted that in addition, "The growing public perception of the EU appears to be important to this democratic expansion and convergence, as is the role of the institutions in performing European governance and encouraging communication and discourse" (ibid.: p. 20). This shall not be a straightforward process; the normative principles of participation and transparency within the EU might be often broken, but these steps backwards can intensify communication and protest and in this way creating the necessary conditions for democracy (ibid.).

Thus, public attitudes have become an important component of European integration, but it should be noted that EU citizens vary in their support for European integration (Gabel, 1998). In the late 1990s, five possible theoretical explanations for public attitudes toward European integration were developed, which are as it follows: Cognitive mobilization (high cognitive mobilization allows citizens to identify with a supranational political community, such as the EU); political values (support for European integration is related with value positioning concerning economic and political topics); utilitarian model (EU citizens with diverse socioeconomic situations experience different costs and benefits from integrative policies), class partisanship (citizens adopt attitudes toward integration which reflect the position of the party they support) and support for Government (citizens project their assessments of the party of their national leader onto integration) (ibid.). This model has been used for the purpose of this research as a theoretical framework. Studies conducted related to these theories have results that point out for strong support for the utilitarian hypothesis, meaning that support for integration was positively related to the level of human capital and financial capital and residency in an intra-EU border region (ibid.). According to Gabel, it should be highlighted that citizen's support for integration could be flexible, on the one side the cognitive mobilization and political values theories propose that a citizen's support for integration is based on personal political characteristics, on the other side, the different theories suggest citizens could change their support for integration depending on specific factors, such as the support for the governing party (ibid.).

There was observed a public opinion and political elite divide concerning European integration, which showed that elites tend to be more favourable to it, exposing a gap between elites and the public (Hooghe, 2003). According to Hooghe, it should be noted that elites and the

public searched for different things from Europe. Nonetheless, elites were still more enthusiastic concerning European integration than is the public, this could be related to the fact they were more satisfied with the basic rules of the EU, "Elites desire a European Union capable of governing a large, competitive market and projecting political muscle; citizens are more in favour of a caring European Union, which protects them from the vagaries of capitalist markets." (ibidem.: p. 296).

Attitudes towards the EU are connected to political participation which could be understood as "is made up of all those political activities that citizens can become involved in as they to attempt to influence political decision-making", these activities could be more conventional and mainstream or confrontational and unconventional, in any way political participation is considered as a fundamental part of democracy since it ensures effective representation (Grasso, 2018 p. 181). Political participation is not a frozen concept and there have been considered three basic forms of it, which are as it follows, institutional politics (elections, campaigns and party membership), protest activities (demonstrations and new social movements) and civic engagement (associative life, community participation, voluntary work) (Kovacheva, 2005).

There has been international debate over the topic of youth's political participation in which it has been expressed the concern of young people's lack of political engagement simply in electoral politics; it has been believed that this is due to little knowledge and interest on the subject (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010). In fact, "while young people are less likely to engage in some conventional activities, they are more likely to be involved in extra-institutional modes of political engagement and online activism" (Grasso, 2018 p. 182). Many young people do have social and political concerns. Still, they do not participate in traditional modes since they do not feel represented, "they continue to value recognition by the state and continue to appreciate rational, discursive, deliberative democracy." (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010 p. 28). Indeed, they take on more individualized and everyday practices to shape society. Ordinary ways are used to act upon their political and social concerns, which should be considered when approaching new participatory styles (ibid.). Thus, young people showed to be neither profoundly political apathetic nor at the forefront of new political styles, but it should be acknowledged that more recently social movements such as 'Fridays for Future' had young people in their leadership, "Anxious about their future on a hotter planet and angry at world leaders for failing to arrest the crisis, masses of young people poured into the streets on every continent on Friday for a day of global climate protests. Organizers estimated the turnout to be around four million in thousands of cities and towns worldwide. It was

the first time that children and young people had demonstrated to demand climate action in so many places and in such numbers around the world." (Sengupta, 2019).

While some truly do not have an interest in representative politics, many would like to be a part of the processes of deliberation within the structures of democracies, which currently tend to marginalize the youth (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010). Youth political action goes beyond political institutions and non-governmental organizations; it also happens through involvement in looser networks, friendship circles and individual action, the Internet has also presented itself to be another resource for youth participation (Kovacheva, 2005). Additionally, "under the conditions of decentralisation and globalisation, political actions are not actions directed towards the nation-state but also towards smaller and wider constituencies – towards regional and local communities, as well as those at European and global level." (ibid.: p. 26).

On political marginalization, some differences should be considered between employed and unemployed youth, those without a job tend to have more radical political attitudes, but there are few revolutionaries among the youth (Bay and Blekesaune, 2003). In general, unemployed youth have less political confidence and are less satisfied with how democracy works because of their disappointment with the authorities handling their employment situation (ibid.). Indeed, during times of crisis young people are taking up new forms of political participation across Europe, even if voting is still the most common activity, youth increasingly joins alternative modes such as protests and boycotts, they tend to be connected to social movements (Grasso, 2018). Also, the developments in digital technology have changed the way young people express themselves and participate politically, "[technology] has encouraged young people to construct their own sense of community through the internet often based around identity politics and campaigning around issues surrounding the politics of recognition" (ibid.: p. 189). In fact, young people through news ways of political participation, have shown their preference for single-issue campaigns (ibid.).

As political participation is one of the central parts of democracy, it has been assessed that young people appear not to show a homogenous profile concerning their attitudes and behaviours on EU elections, "The electoral process to choose representatives for the European Parliament wakes no special interest among the European youth" (Díaz, 2008 p. 181). It should be highlighted that participation patterns vary throughout Europe during the same electoral process, and as pro-European associations of young people increase, by this is understood interest in issues connected to the EU, participation in European Parliament (EP) elections is higher too (ibid.). Both scholars and policy-makers have placed high hopes in exchange programmes to increase European support

across borders (Kuhn, 2012). However, such programmes like the Erasmus tend to include higher education students who are already favourable to the EU, also even people who do not take part in university studies if they are involved in transnational networks and mobility they are still prone to support the EU just the same (ibid.). Nonetheless, "models, transnational practices have a strong, positive and highly significant effect on both European self-categorization and attachment to Europe." (ibid.: p. 1006). The lack of impact of the Erasmus Programme on its participants could be connected to the already strong presence of Europe in the lives of students, but by studying abroad, there is the possibility of new layers on the already existing view of Europe amongst students (Mol, 2013). In general, "from their experiences abroad and through their social interaction, mobile students from EU states appropriate Europe as a personal project, in which the social predominates over the political." (ibid.: p. 220). Indeed, the Erasmus Programme has had as one of its goals to promote interactions between Europeans, and while joining it no immediate profound changes can be detected in its students after an academic year, longer interactions between Europeans could change this (Sigalas, 2010).

Through mobility in Europe citizens could be legitimising the 'post-national' European project, fulfilling the notion of freedom of movement, and defocusing from party politics (Favell, 2010). In fact, conventional models of political participation might not cover the entirety of ways young citizens are having an impact on their societies, "so much more can be said about their active engagement as residents, consumers, parents, and gentrifiers in the cities they have chosen to live in" (ibid.: p. 213). Indeed, young people feel alienated from formal politics, translated generally in voting and party membership, even though they are still broadly interested in politics, even though they tend to think that their elected representatives appear not to listen to them (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003). Thus, when analysing lack of youth political participation, it should be acknowledged that the reasons for this are varied and go beyond from simple lack of interest (ibid.). Therefore, indifference expressed in youth does affect voter turnout, "if the outcome would make no difference, and voting involves costs, the rational citizen would not vote" (Brody and Page, 1973 p. 2).

Young Europeans have distanced themselves from parties and politicians and have engaged more in issue-based forms of participation; this could be due to the fact politicians, parties and policymakers have been incapable or reluctant to adapt to the changing times, as a consequence, there is a thin relation between young citizens and their representatives (Sloam, 2013). As pointed out before, young people prefer non-institutionalised forms of engagement, "displaying a badge or

sticker and taking part in demonstrations, are less common than petitions, but are dominated by the young." (ibidem.: p. 852). According to Sloam, this was particularly evident during 2011 mass students' demonstrations throughout Europe. During this time, it was expressed by the youth a desire for something remarkably distinct than what they were experiencing; this meant more transparency in politics, a higher user of direct democracy, the end of austerity measures imposed during the financial crisis and instead higher investments to increase youth employment, greater State regulation on big corporations and implementation of measures to end socio-economic inequalities (Sloam, 2014). A lot of this was because the context post-2008 crisis was of a 'risk society' with an ever-changing labour market and the unlikely case to find a 'job for life' for many (ibid.). Feeling unheard and unable to identify with their political representatives, youth turns for non-institutionalized forms of political participation. Even if voting is still the most common political activity, there has been detected throughout Europe low youth voter turnout in elections (ibid.). Two dangers could appear in this situation, the disconnection of youth from electoral politics, being the vote key for the maintenance of democratic institutions, and fewer contact activities with democratic issues that affect citizens' everyday lives (Sloam, 2013). Overall, one might say that "youth participation in politics has changed rather than declined" (ibid.: p. 851).

Research Gap and Added Value

In literature and the field of policymaking, there has been a concern about youth political participation, which has seen both a decline in turnout in elections and political parties' membership, due to this recent studies have described the youth as politically apathetic or inactive (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003). There could be different reasons for this, such as the political representatives' incapacity to tackle the issues that concern young people or politicians' inability to find strategies for politics to become a crucial part of their lives (ibid.). Furthermore, young people were disproportionally affected by the 2008 global financial crisis. Due to the particular time in their lives they are, together with entering for the first time in the labour market, the challenging context they faced made a significant impression on them (Grasso, 2018). This was also the case in Spain and Italy, where their labour markets experienced high unemployment levels with increased poverty and inequality (Addabbo, García-Fernández, Llorca-Rodríguez, and Maccagnan, 2011).

From the very start of the Erasmus Programme had as its main goal to stimulate mobility of students between universities. With time its scope increased to different educational fields, together

with more participants and higher budgets, leading to approximately 5 million higher education students joining, this meant studying abroad and joining the social life in a different country (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). In a particular time where many throughout Europe are questioning the added value of the EU on the aftermath of a severe crisis, it is relevant to understand how Erasmus students assess the European project and engage politically (ibid.) Indeed, it has been shown that taking part in the Erasmus programme can increase employability and make its participants more active citizens (Pinto, et al., 2018).

However, throughout our research, we came to understand that this only became a recent concern both in academic studies and in reports conducted by Eurobarometer and the ESN. Thus, in our work, we have attempted to make a broader reflection of the significance of the evolution of the Erasmus Programme and youth political engagement. Within the scope of our investigation, we have understood fundamentally that the Erasmus Programme has increased its presence on young people's lives, who saw an added value on joining the exchange programme European Commission, Erasmus 2012-13: the figures explained, 2014). Moreover, according to the ESN Survey of 2019, Erasmus students viewed EU elections as of great importance and showed this by having high turnout levels in 2019. They also engage politically in other activities such as public debates and signing petitions (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019).

Indeed, young people still participate in politics, but they tend to show a preference for non-electoral forms of participation (Sloam, 2013). The crisis could have been a catalyst for youth political action with an increase in protest movements that rose against austerity and spending cuts in social services (Grasso, 2018). As young people's lives in Europe have become more precarious economically (Sloam, 2014), the Erasmus Programme and the EU in itself appear to be a beacon of hope, with high levels of satisfaction with the exchange programme (Erasmus 2012-13: the figures explained, 2014) and positive associations between the EU and economic prosperity (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014).

In this way, we attempted to bring the available literature together with data to understand the significance of young people joining Erasmus and their political behaviour. Indeed, the engagement of mobile European citizens in other ways besides conventional politics ones could represent a new way of politics (Favell, 2010). Thus, as European democracy evolves together with its increasingly international and mobile youth (ibid.). Erasmus students have shown to seek to expand their rights as EU citizens actively, and as pointed out previously, they also have high levels of turnout in EU elections (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). While the Erasmus

programme role on its participants' lives has been explored in the literature in different lenses, there is still room for further research, especially on the political participation of students who join the exchange programme.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

As indicated by this work's research question, the main concern is to analyse the evolution of the Erasmus Programme and political participation of young people in Spain and Italy between the 1980s and 2019. Considering that political participation will be examined, Eurobarometer will be one of the platforms and tools used to collect data together with ESN surveys and other researchers conducted by European Institutions, such as the EC. Mixed-methods, quantitative and qualitative, will be used to try to achieve a full understanding of the phenomenon proposed to be studied. As demonstrated by Driscoll et al. (2007: 26), "The qualitative data provide a deep understanding of survey responses, and statistical analysis can provide a detailed assessment of patterns of responses." (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, and Rupert, 2007, p. 26). Mix-method research design offers more interesting and possible appropriate means of addressing different research purposes in EU studies (Lynggaard, Manners, and Löfgren, 2015).

The methodology also includes process tracing, which in its core analyses reality in terms of time, timing and sequences, focusing on the changing features and transformation of events with their related connections, "which is potentially very effective for both comparative analysis and case studies" (Morlino, 2018, p. 89). This goes accordingly to apply mixed-methods, which are used in process tracing description, official documents, memoirs, mass surveys and interviews (ibid.). The emphasis in this research design is on the different interactions and changing contexts, in our case, the Erasmus Programme's evolution through time together with political participation of the young people who join the exchange programme (ibid.). Following Morlino's work, one of the strategies that might be adopted in process tracing, which we will use during our work, is detailed narrative by presenting a highly specific story, the one of the Erasmus Programme and youth political participation in Spain and Italy in the setting of crisis and shifting contexts.

We use Gabel's (1998) work to understand public attitudes towards the EU and investigate Erasmus students' available data to try to comprehend what influenced their views on the EU. Moreover, by choosing to use comparison, "the analysis of more than one case permits the testing of different explanations and the establishment of more cogent and well-argued grounds for preferring one explanation (or explanations) to others" (Morlino, 2018, p. 20). Also, by using

process tracing, a comparable case strategy, we were able to obtain additional evidence about possible causes and effects, in the context of this research, the potential role of the Erasmus Programme in youth's political participation (Levy, 2008).

As our case studies, we have chosen Spain and Italy to be compared within this research design, due to the similarities found in both countries, "the chosen pair of cases is similar on all the measured independent variables independent variables" (Seawright and Gerring, 2008, p. 304). Indeed, the most similar method is one of the most recognized qualitative analysis techniques (ibid.). Both countries belong to an area which used to be assessed as pro-EU, Spain revealing to be in the group of the most supportive towards the EU before the 2008 crisis and Italy experiencing the same kind of support during the 1970s and 1980s (Leconte, 2010). Also, there has been wearisome of Southern European democracies and their support for the EU (Matthijs, 2014). However, by 2010 the failure of the promises of Maastricht was exposed to the sovereign-debt crisis, which reached Spain and Italy just one year later, forcing economic adjustments (ibid). Finally, there has been a steady increase since 1987 of outgoing Erasmus students from Spain and Italy (Figure 6) year in which they joined the exchange programme; also participants of the exchange programme from both countries appear to prefer them as Erasmus destinations (Pumares, González-Martín, Montanari, and Staniscia, 2018).

Structure of Dissertation

The outline of the present dissertation will be divided into four parts. As one of the central parts of our analysis is the Erasmus Programme, Chapter 1 goes through the history of the exchange programme. In the first part of this chapter (1.1), we have focused on the origins of Erasmus Programme and the different decisions and set of events that lead to the official launch of the exchange programme in 1987 in Brussels. Following Erasmus's origins, we go through the different versions of the mobility programme from Socrates (1995 to 2007) to its most recent one, Erasmus+ (2014 to 2020). Here we examined the expansions the programme went through with updates in scope, actions, budget, and increasing participants. On the third part of Chapter 1, we analysed how Erasmus became a concept known worldwide with its Mundus facet, extending the Erasmus Programme to promote higher education, intercultural understanding with third countries, improve future employability of students and work in accordance with the EU external policy objectives.

In Chapters 2 and 3, we approach our case studies Spain and Italy on the Erasmus Programme's history and the youth political participation in each country. Chapter 2 is dedicated to the Spanish case, in the first section of the chapter (2.1) we go through the evolution of the Erasmus Programme within the country from the end to the '80s and start of '90s to Erasmus+, we also look into the increase in participants (incoming and outgoing) and the possible explanations behind this. Moreover, we examine why students decide to join Erasmus and their perspective on the exchange programme once they do. From an analysis of the Erasmus Programme and its role in Spain's education field, we move towards youth political participation and public attitudes in a changing context (2.2), which means from the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975 until the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Here we assess how after a prosperous economic period in the 1990s, Spain suffers a considerable blow with the crisis of 2008 which lead to austerity measures being taken by the government and Spain having harsher economic and social conditions which had a substantial impact on the youth. In the last section of this chapter, we analyse how was the political participation of Spanish youth during this specific context and events, from participation in protests movements to higher levels of abstention in elections. We also go through Erasmus students' political participation; they show a higher interest in EP elections and higher voter turnout. Nonetheless, they also engage in other forms of participation, such as protests and public debates.

In Chapter 3, we follow the same logic of the previous one; this time, we dedicate ourselves to the Italian case. We go through the role of the Erasmus Programme in Italy's education sector (3.1). Indeed, Italy has proven to be an important player in international student mobility with steady growth in incoming and outgoing students. We also look at the role Italian universities play in fostering international mobility and Erasmus's influence on students' lives. From the Erasmus Programme in Italy, we look to the Italian youth political participation and public attitudes (3.2). In this part of the dissertation, we examine Italy's political and economic context from the 1990's to the period that followed the crisis of 2008 marked by high youth unemployment, government instability, the migrant crisis, and the rise of populist parties. We analyse that the Italian youth political participation during this time was described as low engagement in conventional forms, such as party membership, and show greater participation in demonstrations, political debates, and rallies. We observed that this was a similar tendency in Italian Erasmus students who demonstrate higher engagement in non-conventional forms of participation. They also have a higher interest in elections which is translated in greater voter turnout in EU elections. In general, young

Italians appear to have a greater interest in politics than other young Europeans but are critical of their political incumbents.

Finally, in Chapter 4, we operationalize the comparison between Spain and Italy youth on their political participation and attitudes towards the EU. In the first part (4.1), we use Gabel's (1998) work to understand public attitudes towards the EU and look into the available data on Erasmus students to understand what increased their positive views on the EU; their answers went from the ability to live anywhere in the EU from the European emergency services. We also tackle how the global financial crisis of 2008 significantly affected young people in a period of their lives in which they are sensitive to this sort of events. Thus, young people started to seek more transparency in politics and more opportunities for direct democracy; in this search, they moved away from conventional forms of politics and opted for new social and protest movements. This disengagement from formal politics created some concerns on the legitimacy of democratic systems. We conclude the Chapter to answer our research question (4.2) by understanding the significance of the evolution of the Erasmus Programme and youth public attitudes and political participation in Spain and Italy. We analyse youth voter turnout in EU elections and look into Erasmus students' available data on their political participation. In general, youth tend towards non-institutionalized forms of participation and higher levels of abstention in elections. As for Erasmus students, they tend to have positive associations with the EU, higher interest in EU elections and higher voter turnout in them. Nevertheless, they do still engage in considerable numbers in other forms of political participation. Thus, we have studied that youth shows a tendency to move away from mainstream politics, focusing on single issues and policies and actively seeking to exercise their mobility throughout Europe, and in this way, they might be leading into a new form of politics in Europe.

This, as stressed in the Conclusion of this dissertation, the research made concludes that youth reactions in Italy and Spain to the financial crisis through anti-austerity protests gained a wider audience during this period (Zamponi and González, 2016) showing young people's search for a different direction in politics (Sloam, 2014) and this seeking can also be perceived in Erasmus participants who want more rights as EU citizens (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Moreover, youth appears to be inclined to join non-institutionalized forms of political participation (Sloam, 2013) which could lead to a transformation in politics (Favell, 2010).

CHAPTER 1
The Erasmus Programme from 1987 to 2019

Learning to live together, finally, by developing an understanding of others, of their history, their traditions and their spirituality. This would provide a basis for the creation of a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future, would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way. Some might say that this is utopian; and yet it is a necessary utopia, indeed a vital one if we are to escape from the dangerous cycle sustained by cynicism and complacency.

- Jacques Delors, Education for Tomorrow, Extract from The UNESCO Courier (April 1996)

1.1 The Erasmus Programme: origins

In May 1968 it became clear there was general dissatisfaction with the university system, so in an attempt to improve this, one year later the EP called for a Europeanisation of universities and the French Minister of Education, Olivier Guichard, proposed for the creation of a European Centre for the Development of Education (Pépin, 2007). The difficult economic conditions of the 1970s (for instance, the oil crisis), created an ideal momentum for a greater action in European Communities in the field of education, which was an opportunity for cooperation among the Member States (ibid.). Thus, education matters were slowly introduced into the European Communities policy domain and only acquired momentum during the 1970s (Klose, 2013). Five main moments of decisions can be identified regarding the education area in European Communities: The Treaty of Rome (1957) which laid the ground for the creation of the European University Institute in Florence; the *communiqué* of Heads of State and Government meeting in Bonn (1961); the 1971 Resolution of Ministers of Education meeting with the Council regarding cooperation in education; the 1976 Resolution of the Council and the Ministers of Education responsible for shaping an action programme of education; and the launching of the Erasmus Programme (the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) on the 15th of June 1987 (Corbett, 2003).

In the early 1980s, Europe was going through a period that was marked by economic stagnation and a low turnout of voters in the direct elections to the EP in 1984 of 59% (in 1979 it was 61.8%) (European Parliament, 2014). There was mostly a lack of support among young people for the European Communities (Feyen, 2013). Until this point in history, the EC had been a project

mostly handled by governments and political elites, but in 1984 this was about to change with the European Council meeting at Fontainebleau in June (ibidem.). As a result, the Heads of State and government of the EC Member States decided to create a Committee which was formed by representatives of the Member States and chaired by the Italian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Pietro Adonnino, later on, this Committee became known as the Adonnino Committee.

After one year working, several political and symbolic ideas were developed to make the EC closer to its citizens (Feyen, 2013.). In June 1985 in the Milan European Council, it became clear that further development of the European project required young people's involvement, so the Adonnino Committee put forward proposals to deal with issues related to European youth, such as the lack of support recently felt (ibid.). Regarding higher education, the Adonnino Committee stated in its final report submitted in Milan that, "University cooperation and mobility in higher education are obviously of paramount importance." (Report by the Committee on a People's Europe submitted to the Milan European Council (Milan, 28 and 29 June 1985), 1985, p. 15). Taking this into consideration, several recommendations on the field of education were presented, such as that students should be able to continue their studies in a university from another Member State, implement a European programme of exchanges and studies, create a European system of academic credits, a European award for recognition of achievements in higher education and finally recognition of certificates and diplomas throughout Europe (Feyen, 2013). The Adonnino Committee viewed it when it came to exchanges of young people, that it was a way to build a deeper connection between its youngest generation and the European project, "Action at Community level to encourage exchanges of young people between different Member States helps to promote the identity of Europe for young Europeans." (Report by the Committee on a People's Europe submitted to the Milan European Council (Milan, 28 and 29 June 1985), 1985, p. 17). The recommendations previously mentioned laid the framework for the later development of the Erasmus Programme, which would be launched two years later (Feyen, 2013).

While the political impetus of the Council was essential to move Erasmus forward, the ground had already been laid by the EC(Feyen, 2013). Firstly, even before the meeting at Fontainebleau, the EC was making preparations for creating an exchange programme, also in 1984 the EP had called for closer cooperation between the Member States in the field of education (ibid.). In addition, the Court of Justice of the European Communities (ECJ) did pioneer work with the ruling of the so-called 'Gravier case' from the 13th February 1985, sentencing that, "The imposition

on students who are nationals of the other Member States of a charge, a registration fee or the so-called 'minervai' as a condition of access to vocational training, where the same fee is not imposed on students who are nationals of the host Member State, constitutes discrimination on the grounds of nationality contrary to Article 7 of the Treaty" (Judgement of 13. 2. 1985 — Case 293/83, 1985). Lastly, the EC during this time was under the Presidency of Jacques Delors and had as a Commissioner of Education, Peter Sutherland, who increased the activities in the field of higher education and reunited the conditions to officially launch the Erasmus Programme (Feyen, 2013).

Before the Erasmus Programme, there was the Action Programme in 1976, which can be considered the first development towards a higher involvement of the supranational level in European education policy (Feyen, 2013). The Action Programme from 1976 had, all in all, the following six distinctive scopes divided into twenty-two different actions: (I) Better facilities for the education and training of nationals and the children of nationals of the other Member States of the Communities and non-member countries; (II) Promotion of closer relations between educational systems in Europe; (III) Compilation of the up-to-date documentation and statistics on education; (IV) Cooperation in the field of higher education; (V) Teaching of foreign languages; (VI) Achievement of equal opportunity for free access to all forms of education (Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education, meeting within the Council of 9 February 1976, comprising an action programme in the field of education, 1976). In particular, it was stated in the document of the Action Programme, "It is necessary to promote cooperation in the field of higher education." (ibid.: p.3) this led to creation of the Joint Study Programmes (JSP) which aimed at distributing grants, "intended to foster the development of cooperation between higher education institutions in different Member States." (Smith, 1985, p. 2). The creation of the JSP can be seen as the predecessor of the Erasmus Programme (Feyen, 2013), and was considered a success by the EC, "cooperation in higher education within the European Community, a sphere of activity which has seen notable successes for the Commission since the introduction of the 1976 Action Programme. These successes include the establishment of more than 400 Joint Study Programmes" (Smith, 1985, p. 0).

In December 1985 the EC published and adopted its "Proposal for a Council Decision adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus)" making it ready to begin its journey through the political institutions of the European Communities (Feyen, 2013). The EC made it clear from the start the primary goal of Erasmus, "The purpose of Erasmus is to stimulate greater mobility of students between universities in the

Community." (Proposal for a Council Decision adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus), 1986, p. 6). While the EP and the Economic and Social Committee rallied behind the EC's proposal, perceiving the benefits of it, the situation was different with some Member States; even though they generally supported the implementation of the Erasmus Programme, but disagreed on the budget and legal basis of the proposed student exchange programme (Feyen, 2013).

Concerning the legal basis, the EC believed it was sufficient to use article 128 of the Treaty of Rome (ibid.) which stated: "The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market." (Treaty of Rome , 1957, p. 45). However, some of the Member States required the addition of another article from the Treaty, to create a solid legal basis for the Erasmus Programme (Feyen, 2013), "If action by the Community should prove necessary to attain, in the course of the operation of the common market, one of the objectives of the Community and this Treaty has not provided the necessary powers, the Council shall, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Assembly [European Parliament], take the appropriate measures." (Treaty of Rome , 1957, p. 78). The fundamental difference was that article 128 required a simple majority to make decisions. Aicle 235 meant acting unanimously, which would give each Member State more power over the development of the Erasmus Programme, including its budget (Feyen, 2013).

Ten months of negotiations followed, and a proposal was presented to the Ministers of Education, who were responsible for achieving a compromise to move forward with the implementation and launching of the Erasmus Programme, which they were able to accomplish on their meeting in November 1986, adopting both articles 128 and 235, cutting the proposed budget (from 175 million to 50 million European Currency Unit) (ibid.). Nevertheless, according to Feyen, the EC found itself unsatisfied with this resolution which would make the Erasmus Programme a simple network of European universities and it would not be able to reach the goal of having as participants 10% of the student population by 1992 (Proposal for a Council Decision adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus), 1986). Considering this, the Commissioner, Manuel Marín, decided to withdraw the proposal as a whole, which led to the public having a negative reaction towards the Ministers' decisions and supporting the EC (Feyen, 2013). With public pressure in December 1986 at the

European Council in London the following decision was reached, "The European Council called for further consideration of the Erasmus student mobility programme with a view to reaching a decision at an early Council." (London European Council, 1986, p. 10). Moreover, the Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE) established in 1985 with the purpose to promote youth mobility and a European identity[1], played an important role during this period, when in 1987 it was able to persuade the French President, François Mitterrand, to support funding for the Erasmus Programme (Asderaki and Maragkos, 2014). Five more months of negotiations followed, and a compromise was reached in which both articles 128 and 235 of the Treaty of Rome were used as a legal basis of the Erasmus Programme, it was agreed a budget of 85 million ECU for three years I.E. between 1 July 1987 and 30 June 1990 (Smith, Erasmus newsletter)and the students grants were included (Feyen, 2013).

On the 14th of May 1987 in Brussels, the twelve Education Ministers within the Council agreed on the adoption of the Erasmus Programme, which was later launched on the 15th of June 1987 and came into effect on the 1st of July 1987 (Feyen, 2013). The programme, on its initial phase, comprehended four different actions: (I) European University Network, which assured grants to higher education institutions, to their staff when they were teaching in another Member State and also grants to enable teachers and members of university administration to travel to other Member States; (II) Student grants, which covered the mobility costs of students who joined the Erasmus Programme for a period of three to twelve months (the grants could go to 5000 ECU per year); (III) Academic recognition, which meant the establishment of a pilot scheme for the recognition of university degrees named European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and consolidation of the EC Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC); (IV) Additional measures, which comprised grants for 'Intensive Teaching Programmes', for university associations, support for top specialists to give lectures in different Member States, publications and more information on studying and teaching in another Member State and finally prizes for students and higher education staff members who make exceptional contributions for deeper cooperation within the European Communities (Smith, Erasmus newsletter).

When the negotiations for the implementation of the Erasmus Programme ended, with the Education Ministers meeting, the Commission Vice-President Manuel Marín declared, "ERASMUS is a programme of hope for the young people of Europe", marking a moment which was considered, "a milestone in the development of the Community as a whole (ibid.: p.1).

[1] Even though this is true for the Erasmus Programme, the present research does not focus on the topics of European identity and citizenship

1.2 From Socrates to Erasmus+

Erasmus meant a great change in the way student international mobility was conducted, being an important element of its student exchange on equal terms and mutual trust between higher education institutions (Teichler, 2002). By the late 1980s-early 1990s the EU counted with eight programmes in education and training listed below (Ertl, 2003):

1) Arion (1991-92);
2) Comett (1990-94);
3) Erasmus (1990-94);
4) Eurotecnet (1990-94);
5) Force (1991-94);
6) Lingua (1990-94);
7) Petra (1988-92);
8) Yes (1988-91).

This first generation of programmes had the goal to boost, amongst other things, learning prospects and it did this by promoting the exchange of participants, common pilot projects, the exchange of information on educational practices and the application of comparative studies (ibid.).

After the first phase of execution of the Erasmus Programme during the period of 1987 and 1995, upgraded and broader educational programmes were developed in Europe: Socrates I (1995-2000), Socrates II (2000-2007) and Lifelong Learning (2007-2013) (Azevedo Leitão and Maria Freitas Valente, 2018). The second generation of programmes was based on a new treaty, the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). Article 127 replaced the 128 from the Treaty of Rome, which meant that a new legal basis was established for vocational training education (Ertl, 2003). In 1995 the programmes Socrates and Leonardo Da Vinci were launched with the ratification of TEU and in due course, replaced all the first generation programmes (ibid.). According to Ertl, Socrates was introduced based on Article 126 from TEU, and it focused on higher education. Not only did they have a new legal framework, but also came with unique characteristics which differed them from the previous programmes: there was an emphasis on cooperation in the area of lifelong learning and multimedia; one of the priorities was the implementation of a 'bottom-up' approach with those involved in the programmes; the member States and representatives of social partners became more involved in the programmes; the selection process for projected needing funding

was done by public tender, and finally the principle of complementary funding was introduced (ibidem.). Thus, the programmes' upgraded structure provided a more consistent framework for EU activities in the field of education and training and fostered the reform of these fields in pre-accession countries in central and Eastern Europe (ibidem.). Although these modifications and developments were applied it was considered that the programmes had an unsatisfactory impact, due to the context in which they were inserted, larger EU countries, such as France and Germany, saw themselves as protectors of their education and training systems, whereas smaller EU member states, like Portugal and Ireland, used the EU funds to develop and restructure their systems (Sellin, 1999).

When it comes to the first version of Socrates, it marked a new chapter in European mobility and transborder cooperation of higher education institutions, being implemented in the academic year of 1997/98 (Teichler, 2002). With it came a boost on the European dimension in higher education and an effort to make non-mobile students benefit from the programme's activities, also higher education institutions became responsible for administrating student mobility and cooperation through institutional contracts signed with the EC (ibid.). According to Teichler, the intention was to achieve an ever-growing student mobility by increasing the responsibility set upon higher education institutions, the establishment of bilateral cooperation agreements between partner institutions, increasing staff mobility and activities of curricular innovation (this should also benefit non-mobile students) and a further spread of the ECTS system.

Above all, the Socrates programme had as a general objective "to contribute to the development of quality education and training and the creation of an open European area for cooperation in education" (Decision No 819/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995 establishing the Community action programme 'Socrates`, p. 3).

Following an initial five-year period between 1995 and 1999, the Socrates and Leonardo programmes were prolonged for seven more years with increased funding and expanded actions (Ertl, 2003). Although the second phase of these programmes did not come with a radical change, both programmes were redesigned based on the deficiencies detected in their first phase (ibid.). According to Ertl, these modifications intended to make the Socrates and Leonardo programmes more flexible, more straightforward and accessible. These changes in the Socrates and Leonardo programmes came with challenging negotiations done between the member States and the EC,

the complications found during these talks were due to the public criticism of the management of the programmes (ibidem.).

The same author remarks that, between the years of 2000 and 2006 the second stage of Socrates was in action, it combined more opportunities in terms of lifelong learning, adult education, new ICT and open and distance learning (Socrates II also came with a new set of goals for its development, which were to strengthen the European dimension in education in all levels, improve knowledge on the languages spoken in Europe, encourage cooperation in mobility in education, boost innovation in education and sponsor equal opportunities in all academic areas (In addition, the funding for the programme had a considerable increase, from 850 million euros to 1,850 million euros (Socrates II also counted with the following six action areas (Ertl, 2003).

1) Comenius: cooperation in school education;
2) Erasmus: actions for mobility in higher education;
3) Grundtvig: activities in other educational pathways;
4) Lingua: promotion of teaching and learning European languages;
5) Minerva: promotion of ICT in education;
6) Arion: observation and modernisation of education systems and policies.

The second version of the Leonardo Da Vinci was, as it was its first phase, a programme which contributes to the execution of vocational training policy for the EU, being its main priority to promote the European dimension and innovation in all stages of vocational training (ibid.). Like Socrates II, the second version of Leonardo had among its measures, actions focused on promoting mobility and languages skills (ibid.).

It was in 1995 when the EU started playing an important role in lifelong learning, marked by the publication in December of the White Paper entitled "Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society" (Hake, 1999), being its general aim "to put Europe on the road to the learning society" (White Paper on Education and Training, 1995, p. 51). Nevertheless, when the Socrates and Leonardo programmes were launched there had been shown some concern with the notion of lifelong learning, which was also stimulated by the context Europe was facing with the continuous development of the single internal market, high levels of unemployment, the underdevelopment of education and training in Europe and the growing competition in the global market (Hake, 1999).

Therefore, the policy became gradually focused on the competitive threat from the economies of the Pacific Rim and the need of Europe to innovate in terms of knowledge and technology, and this issue was pressed in official publications of the EU such as 'Growth, competitiveness, employment - The challenges and ways forward into the 21st century: White paper' in 1993 in which was stated, "All measures must therefore necessarily be based on the concept of developing, generalizing and systematizing lifelong learning and continuing training." (European Commission, 1993, p. 136).

It is between the years of 2007 and 2013 that the concept of lifelong learning becomes the name of the programme in the field of education and training, the successor of Socrates and Leonardo, the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) became the first of its kind to cover learning opportunities from childhood to old age ('Lifelong learning': a new education and training programme to build the Knowledge Society, 2006). It counted with a budget of 7 billion euros to support and ensure that its activities were carried out (ibid.). According to the same source, the LLP is built on four pillars, which guaranteed the development of projects which promoted transnational mobility of individuals, bilateral and multilateral partnerships and quality in education, they are the following:

1) The Comenius with a budget of 1,047 million euros which focused on learning in pre-school and school education;
2) The Erasmus Programme which counted with the budget of 3,114 million euros addressing the learning needs in higher education;
3) The Leonardo Da Vinci programme with a budget of 1,725 million euros which kept its engagement in vocational education and training;
4) The Grundtvig programme with funds of 358 million euros dedicated to adult education.

These four sub-programmes were also accompanied by a 'transversal programme' responsible to ensure policy cooperation and innovation in lifelong learning, promotion of learning languages, development of ICT in lifelong learning and finally diffusion of the results of the activities support by the LLP (ibid.). The programme proved to be another success story for the EU as it was shown in the report, for instance, of the Ministry of Culture and Education of Finland in 2010, where it was stated, "The relevance of the implemented LLP projects has, as well, been good, as they have promoted both the national policy goals as well as the EU horizontal goals well." (Puukko, Roisko, and Sallinen, 2010, p. 36).

In 2017 the Erasmus Programme celebrated its 30th anniversary, welcoming in 2014 its newest version, the Erasmus+, its accomplishments were highlighted by the President of the EC, Jean-Claude Juncker in such historical date, "Every euro that we invest in Erasmus+ is an investment in the future — in the future of a young person and of our European idea. I cannot imagine anything more worthy of our investment than these leaders of tomorrow." (30 years of 'Erasmus' exchanges abroad: Commission launches mobile application to mark anniversary, 2017).

Following the LLP, the Erasmus+ is, then, the EU programme dedicated to the areas of education, training, youth and sport for the period between 2014 and 2020, hoping to ensure equity, prosperity and social inclusion not only in Europe but also beyond its borders (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2019). Erasmus+ integrates previous programmes, building upon their achievements to develop further on such as the following (ibid.):

- The Lifelong Learning Programme;
- The Youth in Action Programme;
- The Erasmus Mundus Programme;
- Tempus;
- Alfa;
- Edulink;
- Programmes of cooperation with industrialised countries in the field of higher education.

Even though the goal was to have a strong brand name, easily recognised by many, titles of specific Actions were maintained so that former participants can understand better Erasmus+. Some examples can be the "Erasmus+ Comenius", and the "Erasmus+ Leonardo Da Vinci" Erasmus+ presents itself with six main goals it hopes to achieve by 2020 (ibid.):

- The education target of the Europe 2020 strategy;
- The objectives set on the ET 2020;
- The sustainable growth of Partner Countries in the field of higher education;
- The aims set in the framework of European cooperation in the youth field;
- The goals of the EU work plan for sport;
- The promotion of European values, as stated in Article 2 of TEU.

According to the same source, to achieve the above objectives, Erasmus+ applies three key Actions: The first one focused on the mobility of individuals, learners and staff, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and the Master Loans. The second Key Action centred on the cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, being responsible for supporting the Strategic Partnerships, the Knowledge Alliances, the Capacity-building projects and the IT support platforms, such as the eTwinning. The third and final Key Action is in charge of assisting policy reform through promoting knowledge in the fields of education, training and youth, initiatives for policy innovation, support for European policy tools, cooperation with international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and stakeholder dialogue, policy and Programme promotion. As stated by the Erasmus Programme Guide of 2019, besides these three key actions, Erasmus+ also counts to accomplish its goals with the Jean Monnet activities, like the policy debate with the academic world, and actions in the field of sport, for instance, the not-for-profit European sports events. Other entities are also involved in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme, such as the Eurydice Network and the EPALE. In addition, the programme also has thirty-four programme countries, the EU Member States and Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein (EFTA countries), North Macedonia, Turkey and Serbia. There are also the partner countries which can take part in specific Actions of the Programme, some of them are Albania, Yemen, Tunisia, Brazil and Oman, among many others from all over the world (ibid.).

Erasmus+ has shown some positive mid-term results analysed by the EC, during the academic year of 2012-13, for instance, new records were achieved in terms of participants with a total of 268 143 students benefitting from Erasmus grants to go abroad to study and train (European Commission, 2014). All in all, Erasmus students increased in almost all countries during this academic year, being the highest increases in Malta (40%), Cyprus (36%), Croatia (27%) and finally Turkey (22%) (ibid.). Moreover, there was a 16% increase in Erasmus job placements (traineeships), this meant that 55 621 out of 268 143 students chose to gain work experience abroad either in companies or other organisations connected to their field of study (ibid.). As reported an evaluation done by the EC later in 2018, the beneficiaries of Erasmus present satisfaction rates above 90%. Also, the outcomes of the programme actions show a European added value, according to the EC this is due to, "the high volume and broad scope of the activities funded, together with fairer access to learning mobility, mainstreamed best practices, deeper EU integration and a clear international dimension" (Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), p. 4). Furthermore, the results show coherence between the Erasmus+ and other

EU policies, for example, the European Social Fund and the Horizon 2020 Lastly, the programme proves itself to be cost-effective, especially learners' mobility (15 euros a day per learner) (ibidem.).

Since the Erasmus Programme's creationn 1987, 4,4 million higher education students have joined, this meant studying in another country, broadening their horizons in an international environment and understanding more deeply the EU (Pinto, et al., 2018). Taking part in the Erasmus Programme increases the employability of its participants and contributes to making Erasmus students more active citizens (ibid.). As Erasmus+ is approaching its end, "The Erasmus Generation expects the next programme to live up to its potential and continue catering to the needs of young Europeans and Europe" (ibid.: 5).

1.3 From Europe to the world

In the "#ErasmusUpgrade Manifesto" it is stated that:, "Despite being an EU programme, Erasmus is now a concept known worldwide." (Pinto, et al., 2018, p. 5). This could be deemed to the Mundus facet of the programme, being the main aim of Erasmus Mundus: "(...) to promote European higher education, to help improve and enhance the career prospects of students and to promote intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries, in accordance with EU external policy objectives in order to contribute to the sustainable development of third countries in the field of higher education." (European Commission, 2013, p. 5). The Erasmus Mundus programme goals are mainly connected with increasing the quality of the EU higher education, mobility of individuals and promoting all of this throughout the world, being equity, human rights and social justice on the base of the application of the programme (Lloyd, 2013). Moreover, the implementation of Erasmus Mundus searches, as an outcome, to challenge and transform participants and their respective practices, so the practice-based experience is the core criteria of putting the programme into action, which should lead to reflective practice and practice-oriented enquiry and additionally to the creation and further development of international networks (ibid.).

Inserted in the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), the Erasmus Mundus has adopted the form of 'Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees' (EMJMD), having as an additional objective to enhance the competences and skills of Master graduates and Joint Masters for the labour market, through greater involvement of employers (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2019). EMJMD has become a high-level integrated international study programme of sixty, ninety or hundred and twenty ECTS credits, given by a consortium of Higher Education Institutions from different countries, being also participants non-educational partners (ibid.). The unique feature of the joint

programmes lies in the high degree of integration of them and their first-rate academic content and methodology, and once the programme is completed, the participant is awarded either a joint degree or multiple degrees (ibidem.). Furthermore, according to the Erasmus Programme Guide of 2019 selected EMJMDs receive high funding levels, which allows them to expand their worldwide visibility and have sustainable development.

According to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide (2019), when it comes to students who intend to join the EMJMD, there are additional scholarships for those who come from targeted regions of the world, Partner countries of the EU, this extra funding is awarded through some EU external funding instruments:

- Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA);
- Development Cooperation Instruments (DCI);
- European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI);
- Partnership instrument (PI);
- European Development Fund (EDF).

The previously mentioned scholarships are offered to contribute to the fulfilment of the EU priorities in terms of the external policy in regard of higher education, the levels of economic and social development of the Partner Countries are taken into consideration when awarding them as well as the available budget and the ranking of them, which, according to the same source, are as it follows:

- Region 1: Western Balkans;
- Region 2: Eastern Partnership countries;
- Region 3: South-Mediterranean countries;
- Region 6: Asia with a specific scholarship allocation to the Least Developed Countries;
- Region 7: Central Asia with a specific scholarship allocation to the Low and Lower Middle-Income Countries;
- Region 8: Latin America with a specific scholarship allocation to the Low and Lower Middle-Income Countries and a maximum allocation to Brazil and Mexico;
- Region 10: South Africa;
- Region 11: African, Caribbean and Pacific countries;
- Region 12: Gulf Cooperation countries.

- Region 13: Industrialised countries
- Region 14: Switzerland and Faroe Islands

This facet of the Erasmus Programme also counts with success stories. A study conducted by the Erasmus Mundus Association in 2017 reveals that 51.6% of students who joined Erasmus Mundus during that year were "mostly satisfied", also participants admitted that the greatest impact of Erasmus Mundus was, firstly, in their international competencies (58.7%), followed by career (40.1%) and subject related expertise (33.3%) (Krüger, Klein, Pinkas, Höpfner, and Kuske, 2017). In addition, the majority of successful job-seekers found a job in one of their three preferred job locations (89.2%) and just after six months of graduating (79.3%); also participants felt that joining Erasmus Mundus made them feel very well or well prepared for the labour market (66.8%) (ibid.). As stated by the same source, when choosing EMJMD, participants' main reasons were the scholarship and the possibility to live and study in Europe, followed by the well-regarded reputation of it. Overall, through the EMJMD the EU reveals itself to be an "attractive place to work, study and live in for graduates from outside the EU." (ibid.: 12).

CHAPTER 2
The Erasmus Programme and the Spanish youth political participation in a changing context

Our Europe is one such island; let us welcome the fact that Greece, Spain and Portugal, with traditions as old as our own, have joined the ranks of the free countries.
The Community will be happy to receive them. Here too, the European dimension should help to strengthen that freedom whose value is too often not realized until it has been lost.
- Simone Veil on the 17th of July 1979 in Strasbourg

2.1 The evolution of Erasmus in Spain

In May of 1998, the Ministers of Education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom met in the University of Sorbonne to kick-start the process which intended to build a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), basing their work on the Delors Report from 1996 (Gil, Rojas, and Carpio, 2010). Until today, this is still considered one of the most ambitious European projects, even with its limitations (ibid.). The intention in building the EHEA was to adapt them to Europe's new social reality, denominated knowledge society, in which knowledge is considered the most important source of productivity, growth, and social inequalities (Curiel, 2010). Also, there was a need to increase the job opportunities for European graduates and to create a competitive educational space that would attract students and professors from all over the world (Gil, Rojas, and Carpio, 2010).

In the early 2000s, another of the great initiatives started by the EU in the field of education and mobility (Erasmus Programme) showed one of the most significant difficulties facing the EHEA: students would travel to foreign universities where they were able to continue their studies and lived unique personal experiences, but when they returned to their home university they faced a complicated problem, their studies done in another university were not officially recognised (Gil, Rojas, and Carpio, 2010). This meant that the further development of the European project, which should count on citizens who consciously felt Europeans, had to deeply reform the countries' educational systems that were a part of the EHEA (ibid.). On the 19th of June in 1999, the Bologna Declaration is signed by twenty-nine countries, becoming the most significant push for European universities to take on needed changes which would allow them to fulfil their role as pioneers in developing a knowledge society (Curiel, 2010). The Bologna Declaration (1999) was intended to

foster cooperation between universities and the flexibility of the educational systems within a globalised world.

The Ministers of Education met once more in Prague on the 19th of May 2001, where they created a document in which they showcased the actions which would accomplish the goals set in the Bologna Declaration (Andrés, 2008/2009) and where they adopted an official definition of the concept of *lifelong learning* (Curiel, 2010). One year later, in Zurich, another meeting took place in which the ECTS was given a clearer and precise definition and scope (Andrés, 2008/2009). Also in 2002 the summit between heads of State in Barcelona in March there was given great attention to the efforts which had to be made to eliminate the obstacles for mobility of students, teachers who wished to study, research and innovate (Curiel, 2010); in 2003 in Berlin, with forty ministers of Education present, all the aspects, goals and frameworks formerly discussed, such as the ECTS, were reinforced (Andrés, 2008/2009). Later on, in the summit of Dublin in 2004, the three cycles of higher education studies were defined for all European students: the bachelor, the master and finally the doctorate; one year later in Bergen the ministers of Education made official plans and adopted the ECTS, the three studying cycles previously mentioned and the methods and criteria which would ensure the quality of the EHEA (ibid.).

The academic year of 2010/2011 was the last date to adopt and adapt to the EHEA officially. Until this point, profound changes happened in the universities throughout the countries that choose to join (Curiel, 2010). In Spain, this led to intense and long debates and served as an opportunity to reform the Spanish universities (Gil, Rojas, and Carpio, 2010). Before the EHEA, Spain had a traditional duality in the university system the cycles of three years (*diplomaturas*) and cycles of five years (*licenciaturas*), the first type of studies had a professional orientation and scope, and the second type was seen as a more 'prestigious' course of education within the higher education level, with the introduction of the framework of readable and comparable degrees this way a great step in the further training of former students from *diplomaturas* (ibid.). As stated by the same source, the first cycle of studies was the Bachelor and it has as goal the achievement of general and specific knowledge, which should allow the graduate to access the labour market and continue professional training; the second one is the Master degree which enables students to research and accomplish academic or professional specialization; finally, there is the doctorate which did not suffer profound changes as it was before in the Spanish universities, being divided into a period of learning and training and another for research.

After the full adaptation by the Spanish educational system to the goals set by the Bologna Declaration and further developed in what is commonly known as the Bologna Process, universities became the entities responsible to propose study plans which are more suited to the needs of new students in terms of employability and training, also the Autonomous Communities of Spain have now a greater and more decisive role in the distribution of the new cycles of studies as well as their application, all under their supervision (Curiel, 2010). This radical transformation faced by the Spanish higher education system had four main difficulties, which once they were surpassed it meant the full success of the adaptation of the Spanish university model to the new frameworks and objectives established by the Bologna Process: structural change, methodological change which entailed the development of new mindsets, adaptation to a system based on learning and lastly, understanding the ECTS entirely and knowing how to properly apply it in study plans (ibid.).

In fact, the ECTS focused on the value of the total work of students in universities (i.e. theoretical, practical and individual work), this led to changes in the way professors taught, on what was expected of students and university administration (Curiel, 2010). The new teaching methodologies could be defined as case studies, learning by problem-solving, project creation and teamwork/co-work (Andrés, 2008/2009). As far as the Spanish universities are concerned, by joining the EHEA a new set of strategies were implemented, such as the program-contract; the innovation projects for professors; the programmes for training and support in the area of teaching; seminars for new incoming professors or for learning new teaching methodologies; and crash courses to learn how to use technological devices and tools in university classes - all of these actions helped to stimulate a new generation of professors (ibid.). As a matter of fact, the Bologna Process is responsible for having opened a debate, which still goes on today, about teaching methods (ibid.). Furthermore, the vision that came with the Bologna Declaration meant a new perception within higher education systems, and the curricular structure became based on the development of competencies which would allow students to face the challenges of the new society they were inserted in (Curiel, 2010). There were now two types of competencies: general, which are common to all university courses, and specific, which enable the student to practice a certain profession (ibid.).

The Bologna Process and the EHEA generated a debate amongst Spanish university students. Even though they viewed both positively, in March 2008 student's protests were organised all over the country to go against the Bologna Process, intensifying in April and May with the occupation of some university buildings (Elias, 2010). The Spanish newspaper *El País* reported

on the 13th of November of that year on one of the protests that happened in Madrid, in which the union leader of students during that time, described some of the reasons for thousands of students being on the streets, "We are here to defend public education, so it is not privatised, because that is what they are doing in all the cycles: Kindergarten, high school, professional training and university. The Bologna Plan will lead to the privatisation of the higher education system"[2] (El País - agencias, 2008). Throughout time, the criticism of Spanish students towards the EHEA and the Bologna Process became clearer and amongst them the following points should be stressed (Elias, 2010):

1) The European funds will not be enough for universities which will inevitably lead them to seek private funding, from companies for instance, and this will mean the end of education as a public service and as an independent area;
2) The bachelor degree and its general character will require students to achieve specialization on their field through the master's degree, and not all students will have the financial capacity to do so; also some will choose not to enrol in a master due to the concerns in entering later the labour market;
3) The Bologna Process privileges economic factors;
4) Absence of student participation in the Bologna Process;
5) Increase in the workload of students because of the ECTS and the new model of teaching focused on the students.

However, there were also noticed advantages that came with the execution of the Bologna Process in Spain, such as the increase of student mobility; the support and expansion of language learning; the final grade of students became a product of continuous work; the facilitation of the access to the labour market; the credentials with which students conclude their studies in Europe became more similar which lead to the growth of international mobility and of job offers; lastly university education focus on better preparing students for the labour market (González-Serrano, 2011). Still, there are specific characteristics of the Spanish higher education system that worsened with the Bologna Process, for instance, the assessments' quality decreased, the classrooms did not change to fit the new teaching methodologies; additionally students still spend

[2] Original version, "En defensa de la educación pública, para que no se privatice, porque es lo que se están haciendo en todas las etapas: Infantil, Secundaria, Formación Profesional y Universidad. El Plan Bolonia implicará la privatización de la universidad" Source: Miles de estudiantes salen a la calle contra el Plan Bolonia, 2008, *El País*

many hours in the universities which does not allow them to fully accomplish the goals that came with the ECTS (Elias, 2010).

When it comes to international mobility, one of the priorities of the Bologna Process, Europe reveals itself to be a great case of international experience, where the social relations of individuals transcend national borders (Raffini, 2014). Indeed, international mobility is considered an important instrument in the building of European society since nowadays, it is not limited to only a few (ibid.). According to Raffini, mobility is regarded as an instrument of Europeanization from down to top (horizontal Europeanization); this is accompanied by a Europeanization by institutional tools (vertical Europeanization). It is in this context that the Erasmus Programme distinguishes itself by being an initiative by the EU, which combines both types of Europeanization, vertical and horizontal, since the young people who join it not only identify themselves with Europe but also have built social relations that transcend national borders (ibid.). Therefore, the Erasmus Programme is inserted in the general European context of free movement, being the right of university students to conduct their studies in another Member State supervised by the Directive 90/366/EEC (Reche, 1998).

Contemporary to the Bologna Process, there was the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010) which was agreed by the European Council, being this the first time that a direct call was made to develop and modernise the education systems throughout the EU by one of its highest bodies (Pépin, 2007). In the Lisbon Strategy, EU leaders recognised that the future of the economic prosperity of the EU and social development lied extensively on lifelong learning. Hence, investments in education and training had to be made. To accomplish this, three strategic goals were set: assuring quality and efficiency in the education and training systems, access to education to all and openness to the world (ibid.).

Erasmus in this period was a sub-programme in the Lifelong Learning Programme. Being considered the most emblematic and popular one, it gave origin to the latest version of the EU programme on education, training, youth and sports, entitled Erasmus+ (2014-2020) (López and Martos, 2014). The Erasmus Programme had had a steady evolution, when it was launched in 1987 to 1990, 32.614 students joined from eleven countries, among them Spain, by 1995, 251.683 students had participated. At the beginning of the new century the programme counted with 455.782 students (Socrates I), and by the academic year of 2006/2007, almost one million students had joined the then called Socrates II Programme (943.849 students) (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2010).

In its most recent version, Erasmus+ has allowed nine million people to study, train, volunteer and acquire professional experience abroad (De Erasmus a Erasmus+: treinta años de historia, 2017). This positive evolution and success could be traced to some characteristics of the mobility programme, such as the its broad and flexible concept, the management based on trust on the institutions and the Erasmus coordinators, as well as giving the universities great independence in managing it (Sánchez, 2015). Furthermore, ECTS ensures that once the programme is completed the studies conducted should be recognised, more Erasmus is based upon an active dialogue and relation between professors and pupils, as well as the support is given from the university coordinators to international students (ibid.).

The Erasmus+ was developed within the strategy of 'Europe 2020' which created a forum on European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") that has four common EU goals (European Policy Cooperation (ET2020 framework)):

1) Turn lifelong learning and mobility into a reality;
2) Working on the improvement of the quality of education and training systems;
3) Promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship;
4) Boost creativity and innovation in all education and training levels, together with entrepreneurship.

Taking the above objectives into consideration, from 2013 on specific recommendations were made to Spain to achieve the vision set for the EU and tackle the post-crisis consequences (ibid.). The 2013 NRP also highlights the importance of a swift implementation of the reform of the educational system and improving the overall quality of education and training." (European Commission, Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on Spain's 2013 national reform programme and delivering a Council opinion on Spain's stability programme for 2012-2016 {SWD(2013) 359 final}, 2013, p. 5). One of the main targets set by the strategy 'Europe 2020' was to reduce the early leavers (18 to 24 years old) from education and training below 10% (European Policy Cooperation (ET2020 framework), 2019). The evolution of this trend can be seen in the following graphic published by Eurostat, which shows that it has had a steady decrease since the year of 2002, being close to the goal set (Eurostat, 2018):

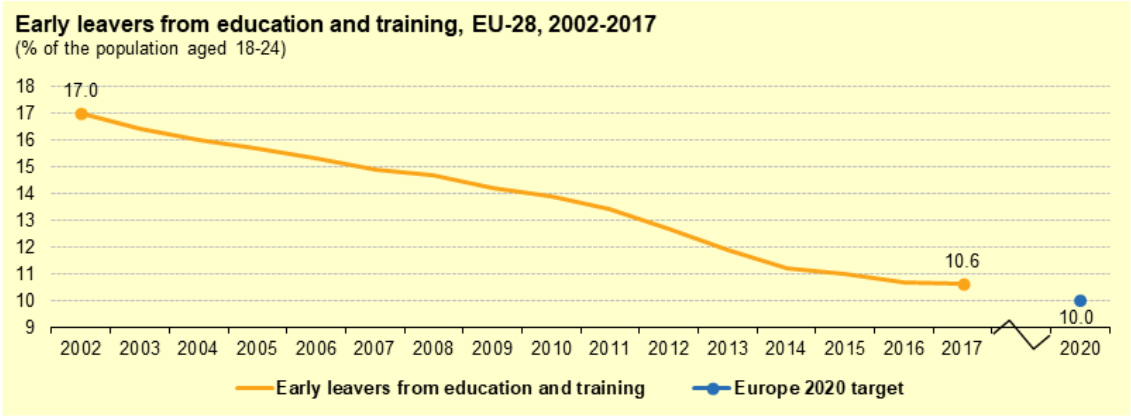

Figure 1 Early leavers from education and training, EU-28, 2002-2007, source: Eurostat

In the Spanish case, the early school leavers from education and training kept being in 2018 above the EU average and so reducing this phenomenon was present in one of three final recommendations by the EC, even though it has been lowered in the last decade, "Reduce early school leaving and regional disparities in educational outcomes, in particular by better supporting students and teachers." (European Commission, Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2018 National Reform Programme of Spain and delivering a Council opinion on the 2018 Stability Programme of Spain, 2018, p. 8). According to Eurostat, Spain had in 2018 the highest rate of early school leaving in the EU counted at 17.9%, being the EU average at that time of 10.6% (Eurostat, 2019). Looking specifically at higher education, Spain has had a high early dropout rate, with 21.8% of students leaving during their first year of bachelor's programme and 8.3% changing their degrees, also only 34.9% graduate in the programmed length of a bachelor's degree (four years) (Education and Training Monitor 2018 Spain, 2018). Additionally, less than 10% of Spanish higher education graduates have joined mobility programmes abroad (ibid.).

While only 7.6% of higher education students joined international mobility programmes such as Erasmus (Education and Training Monitor 2018 Spain, 2018), the evolution of the students who have participated specifically in this programme has been overall stable and positive can be noted on Figure 2. Nevertheless, there have been some academic years in which there was a decrease, such as from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010 and from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014, this could be explained by the financial and economic crisis which affected mainly the lower-middle-class from where a significant amount of Erasmus students come from; also there was distrust on the actions of the former Minister of Education, Culture and Sport, José Ignacio Wert (from 2011 to 2015,

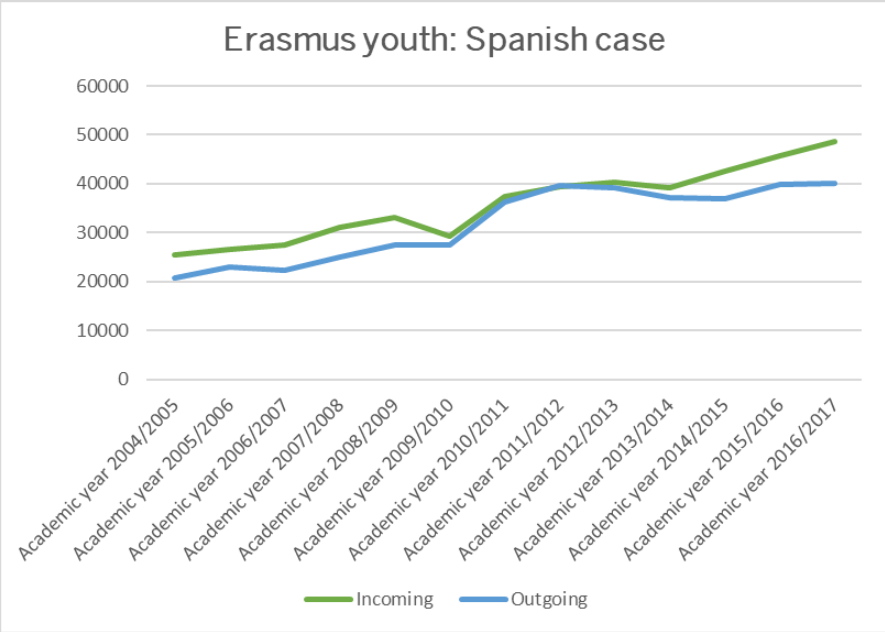

Figure 2 Erasmus students & trainees: Spanish case, source: Erasmus statistics by the European Commission

when the Minister resigned) (Sánchez, 2015), which, amongst other things, provoked student strikes in Spain with adhesion of 90% according to the newspaper El País (El Sindicato de Estudiantes amenaza con huelga indefinida si Wert no se va, 2013). Moreover, there was a reduction on grants and changes on the access and participation of the Erasmus Programme (Sánchez, 2015).

Looking over where all most outgoing students choose to do their Erasmus, since the academic year of 2004/2005, Italy has been the most popular destination, followed by France, Germany and the United Kingdom; also most incoming Erasmus students Spain received came from the same countries mentioned before (Erasmus statistics, 2004-2017). Andalucía, Comunidad Valenciana, Madrid and Cataluña are some of the regions that concentrate most incoming and outgoing Erasmus students (65% between 1995 and 2006), it is also where there

can be found the biggest university systems in the country (López, Esparrells, and García, 2009). Spanish regions have taken on a role to help financially the students who decide to study abroad, and every region has different criteria and methods to do this, some award grants based on academic merit, others based the amount on being given on the country of destination (ibid.). Aa stated by the same source, the most internationally active higher education institutions in Spain are usually the ones located in regions with a higher income per capita, recently established, and public or private universities.

The flows of Erasmus students from and to Spain could be explained by the difference between receiving and sending country when it comes to the quality and cost of living and the cultural bonds, which might exist (López and Martos, 2014). Furthermore, warmer climates and cultural traditions that are more well-known internationally could pose as more attractive when students decide which universities they will apply, though the language spoken reveals itself to be a factor with weight when deciding (ibid.). Moreover, Spanish universities have been investing in their internationalisation, which entailed signing dynamic international conventions that lead to more support for outgoing students and increasing Spanish universities' worldwide attractiveness (Valle and Garrido, Movilidad de estudandiantes universitarios: es España atractivo para los estudiantes Erasmus?, 2009). All these factors could clarify why Spain is a popular Erasmus destination (López and Martos, 2014), occupying the first place in 2017 as the country which received more Erasmus students in the sector of higher education, a total of 48,595, this also came with an increase in financing and grants (España consolida su liderazgo en el programa europeo Erasmus+, 2019). Spain proves itself to be an "importer" country for the Erasmus Programme (Valle and Garrido, La asimetría en los flujos de movilidad , 2009).

There could be considered several reasons why Spanish students choose in the first place to partake on mobility programmes, like Erasmus, being personal motives the ones that are more relevant for them; students search for new experiences, personal growth, and independence (Herrero, Andrés, and Pons, 2008). Specifically, Erasmus students ally these personal reasons to professional and academic ones, connected to improving and learning a different language and hoping to increase their probabilities to enter the labour market; also a third motive is the desire to travel, followed by the hope in obtaining positive references and finally the assurance of financial help during the mobility time (ibid.). There are factors that directly influence student opportunities in joining mobility programmes, such as their parents' work situation, the better it is than there are increasing probabilities for a student going abroad (Ariño, Soler, and Llopis, 2014). Indeed,

economic determinants have a considerable influence for international student mobility, and they condition the destination based on the grant they receive, one of the worries for students is to find it hard to live with the income they receive (ibidem.). According to the same authors, even though there are also language determinants, they do not refrain students from participating in mobility programmes, but they can increase the international experience, reducing obstacles that might be felt.

Considering now, the overall satisfaction outgoing Spanish students feel in relation to their Erasmus period, the motives which could explain it are academic environment and appraisal, the personal appraisal and the European integration perception (Urquía-Grande and Campo, 2016). Students coming from Central European countries[3] students perceive a high academic environment, which could be explained by the effort the universities in this area have made to receive foreign students, such as creating international degrees and teaching in English (ibid.). In general, students who go abroad develop skills to study and work in culturally diverse and different environments, feeling more international and European, also they increase their opportunities to enter a European common labour market (ibid.). Throughout their university path, the decision and intention to join international mobility programmes tends to appear in students before even taking the decision to join a specific programme, as Erasmus+ or Erasmus Mundus (Ariño, Soler, and Llopis, 2014). When looking at Erasmus students and not just Spanish ones specifically, mobile and future mobile students feel more cosmopolitan and European than the non-mobile ones, also these same students are better informed about the EU and show more interest in international and European politics (Fellinger, Escrivá, Kalantzi, Oborune, and Stasiukaityte, 2013).

As the most recent version of the Erasmus Programme approaches its end, the Minister for Science, Innovation and Universities of Spain, Pedro Duque, announced in 2018 additional eleven million euros of investment in Erasmus+ so that the country reaches the record sum of 217 million euros for a programme which, according to the Minister, promotes the international dimension of Spanish education (Rubio, 2018). Furthermore, for the next edition of the Erasmus Programme (from 2021 to 2027), the Ministry for Science, Innovation and Universities to support the EHEA has announced the financial initiative of thirty million euros. Thus, the Deputy Secretary for Science, Innovation and Universities, Pablo Martín González, recognised the success of the Erasmus

[3] Composed by Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. Source: Regions of the European Union, A statistical portrait – 2009 edition, 2008, *Eurostat Statistical books*

Programme in Spain and in the EU during the 'Day for the Promotion of Erasmus+", by identifying the inclusiveness of the exchange programme and its promotion of European values.

While Erasmus took over a greater role in education, the context post-2008 crisis presented a 'risk society' with a volatile labour market. Facing this challenging scenario, the youth felt unheard by its democratic representatives, and this led many to choose non-institutionalized forms of political participation and to low levels of youth turnout (Sloam, 2014).

2.2 Spanish youth political participation in an ever-changing context

From the end of the dictatorship in 1975, Spain has gone into a deep transformation (Golsch, 2003). The economy was open to international competition, industries were modernised, and the labour market was reformed due to the educational expansion the increase in female participation in the labour force (ibid.) However, between 1975 and 1985, Spain suffered from a severe crisis, which provoked a high unemployment rate that mostly affected the youth and female workers (ibid.). Nevertheless, later, in the 1990s until 2007 Spain had incredible economic growth, reversing the previously mentioned state, even with a recession in the start of the 1990s, which caused high public deficits (Élteto, 2011). Spain has always had a considerably high unemployment rate, which decreased during this period to a percentage below ten, even with a migrant's inflow into the country, reaching in 2010 12.2% of the population (ibid.). This economic growth was based on an enormous housing boom, a sector that became oversized and led to the increasing importance of low capital human sectors, which ultimately transformed the Spanish economy's production outlines (Corujo, 2014). During this period, houses were built in great numbers, and big projects were taken in, and in 2003 the government liberalised the use of constructible land, increasing its value considerably (Élteto, 2011). The development of this 'construction bubble' was supported by bank loans, which became cheap, mostly due to Spain's joining to the European Monetary Union (EMU) an event responsible for declining interest rates (ibid.).

Furthermore, also during this time, specifically in 2007 the deficit of Spain reached ten per cent of the GDP, mostly a consequence of trade deficit and the lack of factors to compensate it (ibid.); when the crisis stroke Spain the fiscal deficit became unsustainable, a countercyclical stance of fiscal policy and coordinate management of budgetary and monetary policies (Ferreiro, Gómez, and Serrano, 2013). The previously described 'Golden Decade' of the Spanish economy reached an end with the international financial crisis, and previous positive trends were reversed

(Élteto, 2011). The slowdown that followed brought on an increase in unemployment, only in the construction sector and all related areas (Corujo, 2014).

First of all, the debt that afflicted the country was not the sovereign one, but one of the households and non-financial corporations, this provoked high levels of external indebtedness (Neal and García-Iglesias, 2013). Thus, to mitigate the damaging effects of the crisis that erupted in 2008, public finances were used for this purpose; consequently, the budget deficit increased exponentially, from 4.2% of GDP in 2008 to 11% in 2009 (Élteto, 2011). As a result, the government had to change its fiscal policy in 2010, at the same time, international markets lost their confidence in Spain and other Southern European countries (ibid.). As stated by Élteto, austerity packages had to be implemented as well as a labour market reform, which led to a general strike in September 2010; this was also the year in which agreements had to be struck to save Spanish banks, with funds counting to nine billion Euros. The government lead by Zapatero had to also respond to high the unemployment rate; his administration attempted to conclude agreements with trade unions and employer's organisations so that measures to fight the effects of the crisis would be applied by all (Corujo, 2014). However, the compromise between these institutions was not reached, since the Minister of Labour and Immigration had very little influence to reach a deal amongst all the parts involved (ibid.). In the start of the crisis, the Spanish labour market could be characterised by internal flexibility so that employees would be maintained, and adjustment costs would be lowered (ibid.). As stated by Corujo, between 2010 and 2011, the government introduced the second stage of labour reform, pressured by the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), since during that period over 20% of the population was unemployed, so the urgency for a solution also came from the population.

In fact, it is in May 2011 that a social movement known as 15-M erupted in Spain, which protested the political elites, the economic situation and how Spanish democracy operated (Puig, 2011). In general, the lack of ability to be employed and afford housing created a culture of indignation (Cameron, 2014). The movement, inspired by the piece entitled 'Indignez-vous!' (2010) by the French diplomat, Stéphane Hessel, was successful in exposing the complicity between politics and the bank system and challenging institutional politics (ibid.). The movement was able to unite a big heterogenous group of people, due to the excellent communication and organisation of it, based on the spread of information on the web (Puig, 2011). This excellent share of information and the 'snow-ball effect' it provoked, made the movement extend from Madrid to many Spanish cities (ibid.). The Spanish newspaper 'El País' reported in August 2011 a news

article highlighting the high support citizens gave to 15-M and some of their perspectives on it, "On the other hand, from the percentage of people who know about the movement, 76% considers that "their claims are more than reasonable, and they have the democratic right to fight for them."[4] (El País, 2011).

Indeed, several groups of workers were affected by the employment crisis which undertook Spain, amongst them were those with temporary contracts; young workers who had this type of contracts and those who were newcomers in the labour market; immigrants who tended to have this temporary working status and to work for the construction sector which was deeply affected by the eruption of the crisis; those with lower qualification which in general worked for the construction sector and are less competitive in a labour market with excess in supply (Llorente and Pérez, 2011). Faced with this context of high unemployment the government of that time extended unemployment benefits to protect workers; this went together with the common intense intra-family transfers and a certain level of employability, despite the crisis (ibid.).

Focusing now on the reaction of youth to the crisis that started in 2008, the NEET appeared ("Not in education, employment or training"), by 2011 20% of Spanish citizens between the ages of 15 and 29 belonged to it, even those with a higher education increased their numbers in this generational group by 69% (Jover, Belando-Montoro, and Guío, 2014). Furthermore, school-to-work transitions are often indirect through unemployment, leading to great job insecurity; also, the youth tends to have precarious work, increasing the risk of unemployment (Golsch, 2003). Youth unemployment rates in the EU are generally higher than the adult ones, but they were even higher due to the crisis, reaching 23.5% in 2013 (Ghoshray, Ordóñez, and Sala, 2016). Nevertheless, as (adult) unemployment, youth unemployment responds to the following drivers: business cycles, institutional setup, and characteristics of the labour market (ibid.). According to the same source, this is because youth joins sensitive industries and medium-small size enterprises; also, when they begin their career, they have low human capital, which makes their productivity inferior; finally, the features of the institutional framework, such as temporary jobs and unionization shape the navigation of youth in the labour market. Over the last two decades, the rise of unemployment youth rates has been concentrated in less-educated individuals but has also affected higher educated ones; indeed the effects produced by education attainment on the employment rate are not large (Dolado, Felgueroso, and Jimeno, 2000). Furthermore, there is a downgrading in the

[4] Original version, "Por otro lado, del porcentaje de personas que afirma saber del movimiento, el 76% considera que "sus reivindicaciones son más que razonables y que tienen el derecho democrático de luchar por ellas". Source: Hasta 8,5 millones de españoles apoyan el Movimiento 15-M, 2011, *El País*

entry-jobs[5] market, affecting workers from ages 16 to 27 years old, there is also a slowing-down in the going back to schooling. According to the same source, the training provided by firms is relatively low, decreasing future opportunities for young workers.

Youth unemployment is "embedded in a multidimensional and extremely complex field of social and mental interactions" (Dietrich, 2012, p. 8). Throughout Europe, disconnected youth, a concept related to the beforehand mentioned NEET, tend to lack employment and networks to support the emotional and financial support; also unemployment generates more of it and creates career complexities over the life course of individuals (ibid.). Financial worries and lack of social support are associated with mental health, even though job centres tend not to be prepared to identify psychotic behaviour or personality disorders (ibid.). This phenomenon has been considered one of the main malfunctions of the Spanish economy, being education one of the factors that have shaped it in time (García, 2011). Spain has had an early high school leaving rate[6] in the last two decades, and this complicates the transition from education to the labour market, because of lack of knowledge and most of the times, little training, the repercussions of this have been strongly felt during the so-called Great Recession (ibid.). A stated by García, much of the training that has taken place focused on those who joined the university, which creates an imbalance at the different levels of education and even creates a drop on the education wage premium. Moreover, and partially connected to the economic conditions described, late leaving from the family home has been a feature of Spain's society since the 1980s (Mínguez, 2016). The crisis was responsible for changing the relation of Spanish youth with housing arrangements, from then on, they have preferred renting instead of ownership since residential emancipation makes it easier to find a job and families have fewer means to sustain youngsters in the 'wait period' for a permanent job (ibid.).

There are other trends which affected and changed Spain throughout time; such is the case of migration; during the 20th century, the country was characterised by emigration (Izquierdo, Jimeno, and Lacuesta, 2015). In the start of the century, there were high outflows to Latin America, mainly Argentina, this was due to the free movement laws enacted by Spain and growing population, this came to an end with the First World War, the global crisis of the 1930s and finally with the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) (ibid.). Until 1989 emigration remained consistent, except with a small break in the mid-1960s with Spain's first economic growth (ibid.). By the mid-1980s there was a substantial rise in immigration; most immigrants came from Europe and South America

[5] According to Dolado, Felgueroso and Jimeno (2000), "the type of jobs that youth workers take after completing a given educational level and which are supposed to provide training and promotion possibilities in the future" (Dolado, Felgueroso, and Jimeno, 2000, p. 947)

[6] According to Gracía (2011), "the percentage of the population between 18 and 24 that has not completed higher secondary education and that is not participating in any kind of training." (García, 2011, p. 4)

and by the end of the decade immigration from Africa increased considerably (Bover and Velilla, 1999). The destinations where they chose to establish themselves were mainly Madrid and Catalonia, followed by Valencia and Andalusia (ibid.). Also, during this period and in the early 1990s it was registered a return migration, this means that Spaniards who were born in Spain were coming back to their home country (Izquierdo, Jimeno, and Lacuesta, 2015).

Between 1995 and 2007 the Spanish economy grew rapidly, as it was described before, one of the two fundamental factors that contributed to this was the demographic growth caused by the arrival of immigrants (Domínguez-Mujica, Guerra-Talavera, and Parreño-Castellano, 2014). This also caused a quick transformation of Spanish society in terms of national, ethnic and religious diversity (López-Sala, 2013). The positive economic context shaped immigration in Spain, for many that went there were looking for work, which they found in tourism, services, intensive agriculture, and construction (ibid.). For quite some time, Spain became the most important destination in Europe in absolute terms (ibid.). However, it should be noted that also during this time, illegal immigration was stimulated by the creation of non-skilled and informal jobs (Domínguez-Mujica, Guerra-Talavera, and Parreño-Castellano, 2014). In economic terms, immigration contributed to Spain's GDP by 7% between 1996 and 2000, and 40% from 2001 and 2006 (ibid.).

Furthermore, Spain recovered its population growth thanks to the inflow of migrants and Spanish women who entered in force in the labour market, which lead to the externalisation of domestic activities to, very often, foreign workers (ibid.). However, the 'Great Recession' ended this astonishing migration cycle in Spain; in the first years of the crisis, new laws were applied to restrict migrants' entrance and sponsor returns, amongst other actions (Pérez, 2014). In fact, the crisis was responsible for destabilising the integration process of migrants, who had a higher rate of unemployment than natives (36% more in the fourth trimester of 2013), leading to more precarious homes and a reduction of inflows to Spain (ibid.). Faced with tough conditions in Spain, many migrants decide to bet once more in transitional relocation, 88% of Latin Americans returned to their home countries, others chose to go to another European country or the United States of America (USA) (ibid.). Still, there were important initiatives to support resident migrants in the Spanish labour market, such as unemployment benefits and sponsoring geographical and sectorial mobility, so they could work in different parts of the country and change more easily their economic activity (López-Sala, 2013). In 2011, faced with a challenging economic climate, the government approved the 'Aliens Law', which included modifications in the regulation of how foreign workers entered the Spanish labour market (ibid.).

In addition, few immigrants took advantage of the voluntary return programmes that were established, since their countries of origin had inacceptable living conditions and the benefits contemplated in the 'Spanish Voluntary Return Programme' were not enough to convince resident migrants to leave Spain (Domínguez-Mujica, Guerra-Talavera, and Parreño-Castellano, 2014). There was also a drop in irregular migration arriving by sea or intercepted at the border or at airport control points with the crisis. This was caused mostly because of the impoverishment of those already established in Spain, who could not offer them support (ibid.). Furthermore, maritime controls in the Atlantic have increased, and repatriation agreements were signed with twenty-nine countries, these were tools to discourage attempts of arriving in Spain by sea (ibid.). All in all, the policies of austerity, the cuts in social benefits and the growing tendencies towards an unequal society, leads to a more precarious situation of migrants which can provoke ethnic tensions that may test the democratic pillars of Spanish society (Pérez, 2014).

It is also pertinent to mention that since the terrorist attacks on the 11th of September 2001 there has been an ongoing effort to fight terrorism in the international political agenda; even though Spain had been for some years struggling with the Basque terrorist group ETA (Woodworth, 2004). ETA began with a nationalist youth group of the Basque National Party (PNV), responsible for publishing a bulletin named EKIN; thus ETA had its origin as a faction within this political party (Barros, 2003). It is on the 31st of July 1959 that this faction abandoned PNV and formed ETA (Basque Homeland and Liberty), their first military action came in 1961 with an unsuccessful attempt to disrupt a train where civil war veterans were on board, from this moment on ETA continued their terrorist activity (ibid.). As a response to the actions of the terrorist group, the Spanish government established the GAL ('Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación') which operated between 1983 and 1987 (Woodworth, 2004).

Considering the electoral impact of ETA's activity, the support for their actions declined considerably in the 2001 Basque elections; these ballot results were a political statement against the killings carried out by ETA and their overall strategy to achieve independence (Moreno, 2004). Moreover, with the attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda on March 11th in 2004 in Madrid and the outrage and shock that followed, ETA has kept a low profile by suffering quite a setback with arrests of some of its leaders by the French police on October 2004 (ibid.).

During the 1980s the terrorist activity was perpetrated by non-residents, but this changed in the following decade when Jihadist networks emerged directly in Spain (Jordan and Horsburgh, 2005). Nevertheless, the attack on the 11th of March 2004 on Madrid's trains, signified an

unprecedented act in Spain and even Europe (ibidem.). These attacks came three days before the elections, generating a frenzy in the media and destabilising Spanish society and political leadership (Bali, 2007).

Before this happened, the Aznar government had supported military intervention in Iraq by the USA in the aftermath of 9/11, as a way to get support for his own effort against ETA; thus thousands of Spanish citizens went to streets in 2003 to display their opposition towards the war (Torcal and Rico, 2004). In this political context, the leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Rodríguez Zapatero, emerged, promising to change the course of Spain's foreign policy (ibid.). Nonetheless, during the campaign of March 2004, nobody questioned the upcoming victory of PP, now being led by Mariano Rajoy instead of José María Aznar (ibid.). The campaign managed by PP highlighted the government's economic achievements, but ETA terrorism and the territorial issue of Catalonia were taken as a priority of debate (ibid.). On the aftermath of the traumatic M-11 terrorist attacks, public outrage was felt immediately, through public demonstrations across the country the day after and concerns with terrorism rising significantly (Bali, 2007). In an unexpected turn, Zapatero's PSOE party won the elections with 42.6% of the votes. The popular explanations that quickly followed were that voters were unhappy with Spain's participation in Iraq, frustration on the way the government dealt with the investigation of the M-11 attacks and the increase in turnout which gave space for the expression of discontent (ibid.).

Even though the Madrid bombings generated a heated public debate, it is difficult to evaluate if they would not have happened, if the Socialist Party would have won or not the March elections (Montalvo, 2011). In fact, before the M-11 attacks, the polls pointed to a 'technical tie' between PSOE and PP; also the direction that the vote took could be interpreted as an evaluation of the government's action in the previous four years (Lago and Montero, 2006). Younger and less educated voters were more likely to have been influenced by the dramatic events in Madrid and those placed in the middle and left of the ideological spectrum (Bali, 2007). All in all, "the vote became the decisive instrument used by citizens to control and, in this case, punish the government." (Lago and Montero, 2006, p. 24).

Additionally, to what has been explored previously, voters' behaviour throughout time in national and European elections should be taken into consideration to fully understand the social, political and economic context in Spain in the last years and youth political behaviour choices. Spain belongs to the so-called 'third wave' of worldwide democratization, joining the trend in 1975, and after holding its first democratic elections, an EP election soon followed (Freire and Teperoglou,

2007). Firstly, what happens in the domestic arena, for instance, a party losing votes, shapes what happens in other power levels, like the European one (ibid.). Moreover, the indifference felt in the EP elections has had a minor effect in national politics and the European arena, since Euroscepticism has reduced levels of expression within EU institutions (ibid.). Furthermore, economic integration within EU Member-States has shaped voting choices, and EP election results have even become markers regarding electoral prospects of national governing parties; thus the EP elections have the potential to create a new electoral cleavage (Gabel, 2000). Nevertheless, parties have proven to be less able to represent their voters, and this became even more acute after the start of the crisis of 2008, in which government parties had to satisfy voters' demands, EU partners, EU institutions and international financial organizations, such as the IMF (Bosco and Verney, 2012).

The disruption in the political scene on the aftermath of the crisis made the PP the dominant party in Spain by the end of 2011, and even the United Left saw its electoral strength increase as well as growing support of regional nationalist parties, mainly in the Basque Country and Catalonia (Bosco and Verney, 2012). It is also during this period that the *Indignados* movement rose in Spain, but its impact was more substantial on the public agenda than on the electoral results, not being very representative of Spanish youth in general (Barreiro and Sánchez-Cuenca, 2012). One of the reasons that made Zapatero an unpopular figure on the campaign period as well in Spanish's citizens' imagery, was the fact that his administration denied the seriousness of the crisis in 2008; so the vote of May 2011 was used to punish the incumbent government (ibid.). These specific economic ingredients were also fundamental for the appearance of emerging parties in Spanish's political scene in the general election of 2015; such were the case of Podemos and Ciudadanos, which became alternatives to PSOE and PP, respectively (Bosch and Durán, 2019). However, certain political issues also played a role for voters choosing emerging parties, such as corruption and ideological beliefs (ibid.). This new situation may bring further fragmentation into the Spanish party system, which can complicate governability (ibid.) Recently Spain faced political instability which made the country's position in the 'Good government index' drop, according to 'El País' this could be attributed to, "the crisis in Catalonia, where an independence movement has divided the region, and to the repeat elections in 2016." (González, 2019). Moreover, the leader of PSOE, Pedro Sánchez, failed to win the investiture bid in Parliament as prime minister after the general election in April 2019, being also unable to form a coalition government with Podemos and the United Left (González, Ahrens, and Díez, 2019).

Due to the recession, as was mentioned before, there have been high unemployment rates, which mostly affected middle class Spaniards who either lost their job or saw a considerable reduction of their income, this created a climate of indignation (*Indignados* movement) simply because of the corruption in politics and the financial system (Zarzalejos, 2016). This proved to be an ideal scenario for populism to navigate Spain by spreading simple solutions for complex problems without showing if these resolutions were effective or not, all by using social media as a powerful tool (ibid.). However, the success of populist parties could also be attributed to the fact that traditional and established parties have been incapable of finding consensus in European societies or reducing the generation gap which has been dividing politics, "commitment to traditional parties is all but unknown among younger generations" (ibid.:188). It is in this context that a new radical left party appeared in Spanish's political scene in January 2014, Podemos, which aimed to join the EP elections in May of that year (Ramiro and Gomez, 2016). This party was promoted by a group of university lecturers and activists based in Madrid, who took the opportunity presented by the economic and political crisis to create a big socio-political change, which was not being achieved by the established left-wing actors (ibid.). At the core of Podemos' discourse is the antagonism between the social majority and the privileged minority, defending that 'el pueblo' was excluded from democracy, which had been hijacked by the elites (Kioupkiolis, 2016). The goal of the party, led by the charismatic figure of Pablo Iglesias, is "to achieve an identification of the 'plebs' with the universal 'populus' of the country." (ibid.: 103). Finally, Podemos was able to attract less ideologically radicalised groups, who were dissatisfied with the current state of politics and were deeply affected by the crisis (Ramiro and Gomez, 2016).

Concerning populism radical right (PRR), no PRR party had been able to achieve more than one per cent in any national, regional or European election until 2019 (Alonso and Kaltwasser, 2015). This was due to the conflict between marginal and state nationalisms, making very hard for PRR parties to use the nativist card; also PP was never able to mobilise far-right voters leaving little space for the establishment of these type of parties (ibid.). However, in December 2018, a new PRR party named VOX entered the regional parliament of Andalusia, playing a fundamental role in the changes which took place in the region (Rubio-Pueyo, 2019). Fearing the rise of VOX, the members of PP attempted to turn more to the right political spectrum but failed, and in the general elections of April 2019, VOX entered for the first time in the Spanish Parliament with 10,3% of the votes, becoming a part of the political future of Spain (ibid.). According to the same author, voters who voted for this party, found themselves concerned about the immigration, refused PSOE

leadership and were worried about Spain's unity; thus VOX was able to divide the traditional voting base of PP and achieved its best results in white-majority neighbourhoods and areas with a strong military presence.

To understand Spain's most recent political and social context, it is also pertinent to mention the Catalonian crisis. Since 2000, Catalonia demanded greater devolution, either opposed or ignored by the Spanish state, which transformed into secessionism in Catalonia (Guibernau, 2014). Madrid's politicians underestimated the alienation, which later turned into indignation and a social movement in favour of Catalan independence (ibid.). On the 1st of October 2017 an independence referendum took place in Catalonia, even though Spain's Constitutional Court declared it illegal; there was a 43% turnout and 90% of these voters backed independence, the election was disturbed by unexpected violence by the police, which infuriated the local population; thus by the 27th of October the Catalan government declared independence from Spain (BBC, 2019). As a response, the government evoked Article 155 of the Constitution and imposed direct rule in Catalonia, dissolving the regional government (ibid.). As reported by the BBC, in June 2018, a new government was sworn in, which meant that Catalan nationalists regained control of the region. When understanding the current state of Western democracies, including Spain, one should consider that "Politics used to behave like a pendulum. When the right made mistakes the left won its turn, before power swung back rightward again. Now it looks more like a helter-skelter. Cynicism drags democracy down. Parties fracture and head for extremes. Populists persuade voters that the system is serving them ill, and undermine it further. (...) Fortunately (...) democracies can renew themselves." (The Economist, 2019, p. 11).

The protest and social unrest that erupted in Spain in 2011 could be seen as young people's response to a difficult period in the country (Jover, Belando-Montoro, and Guío, 2014). In fact, Spanish people participation ted in demonstrations at higher rates than other EU countries and "these protests became intertwined with the political fate of the governing parties" (Sloam, 2014, p. 222). Their negative assessment on the socio-economic context shaped their political action and in Spain people who were between 18 and 24 years old showed to have the highest abstention rate, being the main motive the lack of trust in the incumbent politicians; so abstention became an expression of discontent (Jover, Belando-Montoro, and Guío, 2014). It should be noted that Spanish youth has shown more outrage and distrust towards institutional politics than actually indifference, as it is sometimes read, thus "the response has not been so much political abstention as seeking

out an alternative, which was found in what became known as the 15-M movement." (ibidem.: p.10).

In fact, for some time, there has been empirical evidence that voter participation of young people in many Western democracies has decreased and they show higher levels of distrust in their governments and lower interest in politics, as well as less knowledge of political institutions and the democratic process, this has also been the case in Spain (García-Albacate, 2008). Nevertheless, according to García-Albacate, support of Spanish youth towards democracy and increased interest in politics tend to come as they grow up. Even as young, they appear to be active participants in political discussions. Still, Spanish youth has appeared to reject political parties and their role in political participation. Concerning their participation as voters, it should be pointed beforehand that voting is the most common political activity carried out by citizens and a required element to elect governments, it is a way to legitimize the political system. During past general elections, young people appear they went to the ballot less, but as they grow up, their participation increased too (ibid.).

Focusing on Erasmus students, the ESN Survey of 2019 assessed the political participation and voter behaviour of young people who joined the exchange programme[7]. The results showed that 60% of the respondents stated that for them EU elections were of high importance, for people who had studied abroad the percentage was of 60,68% and for those who were at that time abroad it was of 52,08% (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). In the 2019 EU elections, from the respondents of the survey, 68,77% voted in them, 47,27% were exchange students and 71,68% were exchange alumni (ibid.). Regarding abstention, the reasons for that were multiple, for students who were at that time in another country practical reasons such as lack of money to go back to their home country or issues with voter registration were responsible for them not participating, other groups (mobile and non-mobile students), stated lack of time and other commitments (ibid.). As stated by the same source, it should also be noted that 78,02% of the survey respondents stated they have participated in public debates (19% and 21% were studying abroad at the time or had done so, respectively) and 44,84% had joined public demonstrations (ibid.). Moreover, 66,41% of the survey participants affirmed they had signed a petition, and 35,02% expressed their views on public issues on the internet or social media (ibid.). Overall, young people engaged in politics, but the non-electoral forms of participation showed an increase of importance. As Sloam observed: "When citizens do engage, they increasingly participate in personally

[7] Concerning the characteristics of the participants of the ESN Survey 2019, 827 (5,52%) had Spain as their country of citizenship.

meaningful causes guided by their own lifestyles and shifting social networks" (Sloam, 2013, p. 841).

CHAPTER 3
The Erasmus Programme and the Italian youth political participation in a changing context

Ora sarà proprio questa nostra Assemblea che, nel corso dei prossimi dibattiti, si sforzerà di trovare i principi di una sintesi politica, sociale, economica e morale in base alla quale gli Stati sovrani possano decidere di edificare la casa comune.

- Alcide De Gasperi on the 21st of April 1954 in Rome

3.1 The evolution of Erasmus in Italy

Education has played a vital role since the late 19th century in nation-building, though these traditional rules are being challenged nowadays due to the emergence of the EU and the consequent attempt in constructing a European framework for Higher Education (HE) (Woolf, 2003). In fact, HE in Italy has an old and august tradition, but when looking at the Italian youth in 1960, less than 10% of 19 years old had access to university education, being its system considered 'unitary', which meant that higher education was exclusively in the hands of universities (Ballarino and Perotti, 2012). It is during the late 1960s that the increase in the enrolled students in Italian universities started to pressure institutional structures to change and adapt to a new reality. Thus, in 1969 the government abolished the rules, which restricted the access to universities that were introduced during the Fascist period, this meant that all students who completed five years of higher secondary education and passed a national exam ('esame di maturità') could continue their studies in a university of their choice (ibid.). The increase and diversity of university students did not lead to new teaching methods, which resulted in a higher dropout rate, so new professors had to be recruited on a contingent basis, without often the selection method based on scientific merit (ibid.).

A second major reform was launched in 1980 due to conflicts erupting in Italian universities connected to the high level of militancy of students and young professors; this one was responsible for changing the basic organisational structures of the universities (Ballarino and Perotti, 2012). This reform introduced new institutional layers to the Italian higher education system, such as the PhD title as the first step of an academic career and the position of associate professor and the departments (ibid.). Later, in 1987, a new national government created the Ministry of University and Scientific Research, which was established to unify all programmes of scientific research supported by public entities and to maximise the efficiency and productivity of the country in the

fields in which international competition was harsher (Moscati, 2009). Between 1989 and 1991, another reform was carried out by the Minister of Education, Antonio Ruberti, which entailed to decentralise the HE system to make it more flexible and adaptable to society's needs (Ballarino and Perotti, 2012). This meant that universities were now formally autonomous. They could take strategic decisions, introduce new study programmes and curricula without the endorsement on the part of the Ministry, and new vocationally oriented programmes were launched named 'diploma universitario' (ibid.). Although, the governing bodies of universities remained the same, they were given new roles due to the acquired autonomy, this also enabled HE institutions to expand their offer and increase enrolments, based on greater equality of opportunity (ibid.). Two years later, in 1993, the state general financial law partly changed, and the Ministry of the University and Scientific Research would now give a sum to each university according to certain parameters, and each one of them would decide how to apply this money (Moscati, 2009). On the event of the 1996 general election, a political coalition came into power that gave high priority to education, so a comprehensive reform, known as 'legge quadro' was started from pre-elementary school to university (ibid.). The two main goals of it were to establish prerequisites for competence in professional activities and to identify the values of the acquired credits for admission in university courses (ibid.). Considering HE modifications, there were established better links between secondary schools and universities, such as orientation for students in their last two years in school, counselling during their entire university course, improved teacher/student ration and development of teaching methods more focused on students (ibid.). Furthermore, according to the same source, the autonomy previously given to universities was improved, which meant the offer of external services responsible in raising additional financial support; also each university attempted to establish a 'brand name' to be more attractive and well-known to prospect students.

On the 19th June of 1999, the Ministers of Education from twenty-nine countries, including the Italian counterpart, Ortensio Zecchino, published a joint declaration – the Bologna Declaration - in which they compromised to adopt the following changes in their HE systems: " a system of easily readable and comparable degrees", "a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate", "a system of credits" and lastly they agreed on the "promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement" (Ministerial Conference Bologna 1999). The combination of the internal educational reforms and the new international policy aimed at creating a European HE system, accelerated the already ongoing process of modernisation of the education system in Italy; the political context was also favourable

to this as well as the academic one, since professors were aware of the need to keep up with other HE systems (Moscati, 2009). Consequently, the proposed reforms were approved in a short period of time, without extensive debates (ibid.).

Following the Bologna Declaration, the signatories worked on the harmonization of their academic degrees by establishing a two-tier system of first- and second-cycle degrees, this led to deep changes in the Italian HE system (Pietro, The Bologna Process and widening participation in university education: new evidence from Italy, 2012). In fact, Italy's HE system was amongst those deeply influenced by the Bologna Process, since it led to the introduction of a more transparent and equivalent structure of university degrees, fostered academic mobility, promoted employability of graduates, guaranteed quality in the education given as well as making sure there was a considerable European dimension in HE (Cammelli, Antonelli, Francia, Gasperoni, and Sgarzi, 2011). Considering the changes in university degrees, two cycles were created, the first one, the bachelor's degree ('laurea') with a duration of at least three years, followed by a second cycle, the master degree ('laurea magistrale') which could one be accessed by completing the first one (ibid.). To assure the Bologna Process was duly implemented, two legislative measures were adopted: the Ministerial Decree number 509 of 1999 responsible for introducing in the academic year of 2001/2002 the '3+2' system, which was not only aimed to establish the Bologna Process but also to tackle weaknesses of Italian universities, such as the low rate of graduates, a high rate of drop-outs from universities and the discrepancy between the time courses required to be completed and the actual duration of the studies (ibid.). As stated by the same source, later on there was the Ministerial Decree number 270 of 2004 which aimed at reducing the number of study programmes and exams in each of them, also budget constraints were introduced as well as the "laurea magistrale" with 120 ECTS.

The reform that took place is associated with an increase in university enrolments, simply in those individuals whose parents did not have a university degree or came from a less advantaged background in comparison to their peers (Pietro, The Bologna Process and widening participation in university education: new evidence from Italy, 2012). Since the take-off of the Bologna Process other positive effects were felt in Italy, like the reduction of graduation age, class attendance improved, there were more internships experiences; also the earnings of graduates did not decrease even though more people were getting qualified (Cammelli, Antonelli, Francia, Gasperoni, and Sgarzi, 2011). Additionally, one of the objectives of the Bologna Process was to remove some of the obstacles that still existed in student mobility; this kind of mobility in Italian universities was

mostly connected to the Erasmus Programme, which lead to the increase of the number of students going abroad due to the new and easier credit transfer system and the match between subjects in the home university with the ones in the exchange one (Aittola, et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, some flaws persisted even after the implementation of the reform, such as a high dropout rate during the first year; negative performance in reducing the age students graduate; the rigidity of the syllabus of subjects did not change considerably; there were fewer education offers for adults and working students; little geographical mobility; hesitant reasons to continue studies; and low international openness of Italian universities (Cammelli, Antonelli, Francia, Gasperoni, and Sgarzi, 2011). Internationalization of Italian universities shows a dependency on personal interests and contacts, even though this is considered a trait of higher education institutions responsible for making them more attractive for both students and staff and marketing them as a modern university (Aittola, et al., 2009). Considering internationalization, private HE institutions have been showing better performances in this field and productivity than public universities (Raponi, Martella, and Maruotti, 2016). Furthermore, highly qualified human resources still have low wages in Italy, mostly connected to the country's production structurend not necessarily to the higher education system (Cammelli, Antonelli, Francia, Gasperoni, and Sgarzi, 2011). In fact, in 2017 there was an increased number of unemployed young people between the ages of 15 and 24 (20.1% of the Italian population), being during this year the highest share within the EU (Education and Training Monitor 2018 Italy, 2018). It is also important to notice that the quality of research and teaching in Italian universities is one of the factors, which can explain domestic migration fluxes, if students live in a region with a high quality HE institution it is less likely that they will move during their studies and after graduation (Ciriaci, 2014). Recently, it has been evaluated that Italy's investment in education is below EU average, simply in higher education, as a proportion of GDP there was a 3.9% investment in 2016, being the EU average of 4.7%; also by 2028 Italy is projected to have a reduction of their student population of one million, approximately 8.8% of their total student population (Education and Training Monitor 2018 Italy, 2018).

Improving the conditions in Italian universities could be considered relevant to boost international mobility, since students with poor academic performance are less likely to join the Erasmus Programme than their peers with better academic results (Pietro and Page, 2008). With a constant increase of the number of outgoing students, as shown in the following Figure 3, which has been higher than the number of spots available to join Erasmus, universities set up selection processes based on the previous academic performance of students (ibid.).

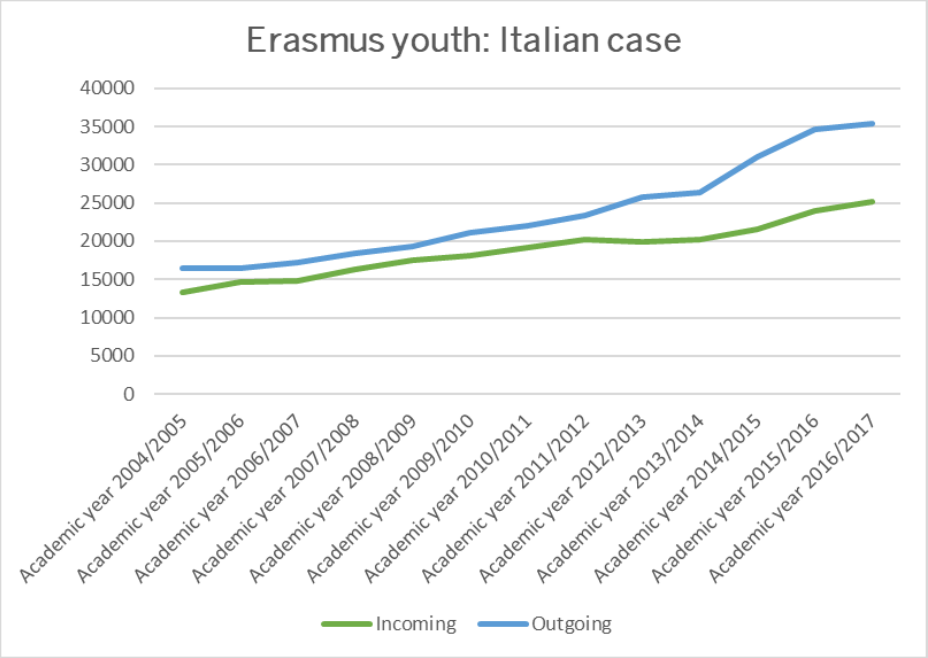

Figure 3 Erasmus students & trainees: Italian case, source: Erasmus statistics by the European Commission

Still, Italy proves to be one of the major players in intra-EU student mobility (Pietro and Page, 2008), with a steady growth of both incoming and outgoing individuals, reaching in the academic year of 2016/2017 a total of 35666 students and trainees leaving the country to pursue their education abroad (Figure 3). The student mobility inside the EU has a tight link with the Erasmus Programme and the Bologna Process (França and Padilla, 2018), both responsible for facilitating, boost and assure one of the citizen's rights of the EU: personal mobility (Pumares, González-Martín, Montanari, and Staniscia, 2018). Additionally, the European exchange programmes like Erasmus, enable a first international experience during which contacts are made, and new relationships are made, including romantic ones (ibid.). In the Italian case, there is a combination of factors that make this country desirable as an Erasmus destination, such as geographical location, climate, culture, and lower cost of living compared to other Member States, like Germany (França and Padilla, 2018). It should be noticed that Italy's investment in the internationalization of its HE system kicked-off in the late 1990s by attracting, firstly, students from outside of the EU with

actions such as establishing a local centre of the University of Bologna in Buenos Aires in 1999 and later in 2006 a Chinese-Italian university was created in Shanghai (ibidem.).

Italy's HE system was one of the most traditional in Europe appearing not to create great incentives for student mobility for this in comparison to other countries, like Finland and Germany; also this phenomenon is concentrated in specific academic fields, the social sciences, law and business (Lindberg, 2009). Moreover, with an increasing number of students joining the Erasmus Programme to expand their horizons in terms of education, training and culture, special needs have arisen, simply for those students who decide to go to an institution where they will have to attend lessons or perform activities in English (Camiciottoli, 2010). In the situation of Italian students, there has been noticed little experience in academic writing both in Italian and in English, since oral assessments have been the enrooted tradition (ibid.). By participating in mobility exchange programmes, as Erasmus, Italian young people are more likely to work abroad, showing that the student mobility plays a role in the outcomes of the labour market for graduates, so "international student exchange programs help individuals, especially those from less advantaged backgrounds, in fulfilling their own aspirations." (Pietro, Does studying abroad cause international labor mobility? Evidence from Italy, 2012, p. 634).

However, due to the high level of labour market regulation in Italy, the transition from university studies to the first job can take a long time, diminishing the incentives to finish their HE education quickly (Lindberg, 2009). In addition, in the case of Italian students, their parents' level of education seems to influence whether or not they study for a period of time abroad (Pietro and Page, 2008). Still, studying in another country is increasingly perceived by employers, universities and students themselves as a key competence that graduates should possess, having the Erasmus Programme the potential to help to develop this competence and skills associated to it (Holmes, Bavieri, and Ganassin, 2015). In fact, in 'The Erasmus Impact Study' (2014) it was stated that "61% of the employers included in the EIS considered international experience important for employability" (The Erasmus Impact Study, 2014, p. 136). In the Italian case, it could be considered that there is also the need for the educational system to adapt to global competition and markets, as well as for companies to assure the 'lifelong learning' of their employees in the matters which mostly concern people today, like environmental issues (Macron, 2012).

The LLP and more recently, the Erasmus+ are essential in Italy to support the implementation of the EU goals and a forum to share good transversal practices (Amatucci, et al., 2017). These programmes have been particularly effective when it comes to individuals'

international mobility, which has allowed, amongst other things, personal growth and internationalization of different environments (ibidem.). Considering the Erasmus+ in Programme, introduced in 2014, it has ten goals to be achieved in Italy's HE area (Erasmus+ - Il programma europeo per l'istruzione, la formazione, i giovani e lo sport):

1) Promote the modernization and internationalization of the HE institutions;
2) Increase labour market and career opportunities for students;
3) Improve the individual skills of the staff in HE institutions and the quality of education;
4) Reinforce the individual initiative of students and their entrepreneurship;
5) Amplify the knowledge and understanding on policies and educational practices of other European countries;
6) Increase intercultural conscience and participation in societal activities;
7) Rise the number of opportunities for personal and career growth of HE's staff;
8) Support the continuation of education and training following an international mobility period;
9) Increase the level of inclusion;
10) Improve linguistic and technological competences.

In particular, the mobility activities contemplated in the Erasmus+ Programme help promote universities' internationalization supporting students to have active participation in the labour market and in society (Erasmus+ - Il programma europeo per l'istruzione, la formazione, i giovani e lo sport). For each studying cycle (bachelor, master or Phd) students can benefit of twelve months of studying or training abroad or twenty-four months in the case of a bachelor's degree with only one cycle (ibid.). Greater efficiency has also been partially achieved with the Erasmus+ in Italy, by the simplification of some measures through new digital solutions responsible for project management, but still, poor communication is still detected among the actors responsible for the implementation of the Program in Italy EC and the National Authorities), being the greatest synergy in the international sector of HE (Amatucci, et al., 2017). Moreover, with the continuous impact of the economic crisis and youth unemployment - by the first of July in 2019 it was registered at 30,5%, surpassed by Spain (31,7%) and Greece (40,4%) (ANSA, 2019) – there is the need to reinforce the role the Erasmus Programme can have in increasing youth employability and supporting informal learning experiences (Amatucci, et al., 2017). Erasmus+ in Italy has ultimately

created what has been called an 'added value' translated in the internationalization of the organizations involved in projects sponsored by the Programme (ibidem.), such as the project of mobility of young entertainers ('Mobilità degli animatori giovanili') in which for instance, international visits would allow the young pupils to acquire knowledge and experience in their field of work (Progetti di mobilità per i giovani e gli animatori giovanili, 2019).

Year	Grants (Euro) for HE (students & staff)	Participants HE (students & staff)	Projects HE (students & staff)
2014	53471486	34392	213
2015	64 800 758	40 244	272
2016	68 749 345	44 065	296
2017	80 184 706	42 081	294

Table 1 Erasmus+ in Higher Education in Italy, source Erasmus Statistics

Year	Grants (Euro) for HE (students & staff)	Participants HE (students & staff)	Projects HE (students & staff)
2014	53471486	34392	213
2015	64 800 758	40 244	272
2016	68 749 345	44 065	296
2017	80 184 706	42 081	294

Year	Youth grants (EURO) (exchanges, youth workers & volunteering)	Youth participants (exchanges, youth workers & volunteering)	Youth projects (exchanges, youth workers & volunteering)
2014	9982686	12445	462
2015	9 431 382	9 854	389
2016	8886798	10 351	435
2017	10305379	9 612	416

Table 2 Erasmus+ in Youth in Italy, source Erasmus Statistics

In the tables 1 and 2 provided previously, it is possible to assess partially the evolution of the Erasmus+ Programme in the area of HE and Youth, where it is noticeable, for instance, the increase of the financial investment through grants since the launching of Erasmus+, from 2014 to 2017 the funds for grants increased in 26 713 220 Euros. Furthermore, the ESN Surveys[8], held from 2005 until 2016, can give some evidence on the Erasmus Programme's general progress in Italy. Firstly, Italy has proven to be amongst the most chosen Erasmus destinations and in 2010 accounted for 20,2% of all outgoing international students (Alfranseder, Fellinger, Taivere, Krzaklewska, and Rosa, 2011). Nevertheless, according to three ESN Surveys from the years of 2007, 2009 and 2014, in Italy, fewer universities had programmes held in English, some of the

[8] The ESN Surveys represent "the biggest regular European research project planned and carried out entirely by students for students. It is conducted annually and surveys students at higher education institutions. ESN shares the results with the main stakeholders in higher education and mobility programmes." Source: Erasmus Student Network website, https://esn.org/esnsurvey/2016

least multilingual students were Italian, and it was also assessed a poor management in sharing information with exchange students.

Since its launching in 1987, the Erasmus Programme has also become one of the most inclusive exchange programmes for students, including those from a lower socio-economic background and those who are career-oriented and experience-oriented (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2008). However, it has been considered there is still space for improvement in this area, for instance in research conducted, in which Italy was one of the case studies, it was found that even though mobile and non-mobile students attended the same university, those who joined Erasmus usually had parents who had higher socioeconomic status; and by joining the exchange programme, they came back with more significant advantages than non-mobile colleagues and so "Erasmus may be viewed as a continuation of an already elevated life trajectory." (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013, p. 531).

Those students who have participated in the Erasmus Programme describe it as a period in which they matured, explored, and experimented different things, meditate on new opportunities; thus, for them, Erasmus is interpreted as a rite of passage, responsible for altering what it means being an 'adult', who should be someone with intercultural skills (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2008). Italian students are among those who not only experienced what has been described before but also seem to develop a global identity, which translated as identifying themselves as European and world citizens (ibid.).

Looking over to the records of the Erasmus Programme in Italy, since its start has allowed half-million Italian students to travel in Europe and spend a period of their education in a foreign university, in 2017 a peak was reached of a total of 60,000 Erasmus exchanges (INDIRE, 2018). In fact, during the academic year of 2017/2018, Indire, Italy's National Agency Erasmus+, allocated funds for the mobility of 32,109 Italian students and in the previous academic year over 104 million euros were assigned for mobility and cooperation projects, from those 72 million euros were for HE institutions (INDIRE, indireinforma, 2017). Between 2015 and 2016, 21,915 European students were hosted in Italian universities, making Italy the fifth most popular destination among Erasmus students (ibid.). Considering internships sponsored by the Erasmus Programme, Italy has had an increase on this area of 20% just in the academic year of 2015/2016, in which 34,6% of the cases it was led as a part of the curriculum, 42,4% chose it, even though it was not mandatory, and 23% of traineeships went for newly graduates (INDIRE, Erasmus placements, Italy at third place in Europe, 2017). In the academic year of 2016/2017, Italy had

an increase of incoming Erasmus students, 10,2% more than the previous academic year, the 19,386 students who chose Italy to continue their studies decided an HE institution in Lombardy, followed by Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Veneto and Tuscany (Silvestri, 2019). In addition, in 2017 Italy proved to be, according to Indire's director Flaminio Galli, a popular destination for non-European partners, 2,156 incoming mobility students, professors and academic staff were from Tunisia (190), Albania (174), Serbia (167), Russia (135) and Ukraine (129), being the Polytechnic University of Turin the institution which would receive most of them (INDIRE, Erasmus+, the seminar of the Universities of Southern Mediterranean countries, 2017). In terms of outgoing mobility, 1,230 chose Extra-European countries, apart from Serbia, which has recently become a member of the Erasmus Programme, mainly Albania (143), followed by the Russian Federation (108), Serbia (103), Tunisia (94) and Georgia (61) (ibid.).

Already in 2018, the EC presented a proposal for a new version of Erasmus, which is supposed to be more ambitious and inclusive from 2021 to 2027, with a predicted budget of 30 billion euros which would allow 12 million people to join the Erasmus Programme, three times more than Erasmus+ (Maddalena, 2019). The former Minister of Education, University and Research, Valeria Fedeli, declared in 2017 the commitment of Italy in the Educational field in Europe; pointing that her country would have a key role in building by 2025 and European Area of Education and in assuring that Erasmus becomes ever more inclusive to all (Fedeli: "Bene proposta Commissione UE su spazio europeo dell'istruzione entro il 2025. Italia avrà ruolo da protagonista", 2017). For the celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Erasmus Programme it was presented in Florence the 'Letter of the Erasmus Generation', a political and cultural document created by former participants of the Programme, in which the Erasmus Student Network of Italy and the Erasmus Foundation, stated some of the priorities for the future of the Programme they serve (30 years of Erasmus - States General, The Charter of the Erasmus Generation, 2017):

- Bottom-up policies which would involve local populations, this would have an influence on a European level;
- Stressing the importance of European citizenship and the History of the EU through school and university education;
- Guarantee paid traineeships;
- Erasmus Generation should have a greater role in the policy building to promote European citizenship;

- Promotion of the implementation of various types of European-level exchange programmes, such as in public administration and compulsory school education;
- Creating agencies responsible for applying the proposals given;
- Implementation of economic measures which would increase the trust of citizens in European institutions;

One of the participants of the conference 'Erasmus+ the future of Europe' held in Florence in which the former document was presented, was Sandro Gozi, an Italian politician, member of the Parliament, who published a year before a book in which he appealed exactly to the youngest generation who joined the Erasmus Programme; highlighting its relevance for the future of Europe, "It will be precisely from the Erasmus generation that in Europe it will finally be the time of the newly founder sons of the Union, who have to be the protagonists of a new European integration process."[9] (Gozi, Il percorso necessario, 2016, p. 181). In a similar tone, the former Minister Valeria Fedeli, in the same conference stressed the accomplishments of the Erasmus Programme, remarking that "Erasmus is one of the most beautiful expressions of the Europe that we wish for."[10] and that politicians must answer the difficulties that trouble the youth, making sure that Europe takes care of them, the young people who believe in the European project (Fedeli, 2017, p. 4).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that young Europeans have distanced themselves from parties and politicians and have engaged more in issue-based forms of participation, this could be because parties and politicians have been unable to change with time and answer to the needs of younger generations (Sloam, 2013).

3.2 Italian youth political participation and public attitudes in an ever-changing context

The crisis which erupted in the start of the 2000's represented for Italy the final step of a decline which began after the recession 1992-93 (Tridico, 2012). Following the recession of 1992, Italy started a robust de-regulation process. With less involvement of the State in the economy, this was connected to corruption scandals responsible for making the Italian public disbelieve State-owned companies (ibid.).

The beginning of the 1990s was particularly marked by the Operation "Clean Hands" (February 1992), a judicial inquiry in Milan, which started by arresting Mario Chiesa, a socialist

[9] Original version, "Sarà proprio a partire dalla generazione Erasmus che in Europa verrà finalmente il tempo dei figli rifodantori dell'Unione, coloro che dovranno essere protagonisti del nuovo processo di integrazione europea". Source: Gozi, 2016

[10] Original version, "L'Erasmus è una delle più belle espressioni dell'Europa che vogliamo." Source: Fedeli, 2017

manager of a public hospice, this investigation continued for years involving several politicians, including former prime ministers, and hundreds of public servants, the operation led to an abysmal crisis of the political system (Vannucci, 2009). Furthermore, the year of 1992 also saw the open defiance of the Mafia towards state authorities, "In July 1992, the Sicilian Mafia sent a loud and gruesome message to those who would challenge it when it killed a prosecutor named Paolo Borsellino with a car bomb in Palermo. He was the second prosecutor to meet that fate in two months; in May, another bomb had killed Giovanni Falcone" (Genzlinger, 2018).

Taking these series of events into account, an economy with minimum intervention of the state appeared necessary for the political leadership at the time; thus a process of liberalization and privatization began in Italy (Tridico, 2012). The governments of this time were aware of the unsustainability of the traditional economic model of which Italy relied upon, but the political crisis of the time and the near bankruptcy of the Italian state created considerable challenges to establish a completely new model of development (Quirico, 2010). Nevertheless, Italy started working to build a very market-oriented economic model also to meet the Maastricht criteria; the new economic vision provoked, on one side, a higher income inequality, lower consumption, industrial decline and weaker aggregate demand (Tridico, 2012). Decades of political turmoil and economic decline made the global crisis of 2008 quite impactful in Italy (Quirico, 2010), which has suffered more recently from a negative combination of a low productivity, low employment and low dynamics of the GDP (Tridico, 2012). Thus, all these forces combined led ultimately to a general economic decline characterized for a loss for the Italian GDP of more than 20% compared to the average of the EU (ibid.).

The government led by Silvio Berlusconi as prime minister (he served during the beginning of the 2000's until 2011), tackled the crisis largely by assisting banks and big firms and cutting public spending (Quirico, 2010). Following the initial financial instability of the crisis, there were felt deprivations in the Italian households due to the austerity measures, such as the lack of ability to take holidays far away from home, afford a private car or even a proper meal twice a day (D'Ippoliti and Roncaglia, 2011). In fact, the global economic crisis hit Italy harder than was predicted even by Berlusconi's government. According to the IMF, the real output growth in Italy shrank by 1% in 2008.1% the following year (Jones, 2009).

However, it was not only the Italian economy which suffered due to the crisis, public confidence was also negatively affected, simply concerning the EU and the effectiveness of the euro as currency, as a consequence trust in the European Central Bank (ECB) also saw a decline

(Jones, 2009). The Italian public debt proved to be another factor of instability, even with the measures put in place to manage it by the government of Romano Prodi (2006-2008), in 2008 the international financial crisis swept away the work done and by 2011 the public debt was at 120% of GDP (Hopkin, 2012). Furthermore, the Italian political scene has been marked by an instable national party system suffering of corruption and scandals together with an increase of power of populist forces, which have been questioning the European project; not offering EU policymakers and international investors the confidence required to support development in Italy (ibid.).

All these factors combined created uncertainty concerning the future of Italy as a member of the eurozone (Hopkin, 2012); there was a study conducted in this time which inquired Italian citizens whether they would ride out the crisis better with their previous currency the lira than with the euro, 53% agreed with this statement (Jones, 2009). Nevertheless, it appears that Italians still see the euro as a currency as a symbol of European integration and by choosing to be a part of the Eurozone the country protected itself from exchange rate volatility (ibid.).

The crisis also had a decisive stroke in youth employment in Italy, since 2011, more than 40% of young workers have spent more than one year unemployed (Dolado J. J., 2015). Southern European countries, being amongst them Italy, were hit hardest by the crisis and consequently have suffered the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe, this could be explained by the segmentation of the labour market, lack of aggregate demand and inadequate vocational training (ibid.).

Focusing on Italy, the high youth unemployment rate could be related to several factors, being one of them the considerable difficulty young people face to enter the labour market after their studies, since there is an experience gap that they have to fill themselves (Pastore, 2012). In fact, according to the OECD in some of the most recent collected data in 2019, "Italy has the third highest share of youth who are neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) among OECD countries: 26% of 18-24 year-olds are NEET, compared with the OECD average of 14%" (Semeraro and Borlizzi, 2019, p. 3). In comparison to their European same-age peers, the activity rate of young Italians has been low, in 2008 it was of 30.9% (compared to an average of 44% recorded in EU27) and the employment rate was at 24.4% (compared to an average rate of 37.5% in EU27) (Dota, 2011). Italian youth was at risk of falling out of work three times higher than the rest of the population and twice higher than the risk faced by their European peers (ibid.). According to the Financial Times (2019), Italy has currently one of the highest levels amongst the youth of NEET, "The proportion of Italy's population aged between 15 and 24 not in education or employment was

19 per cent in the third quarter of 2018" (Romei, 2019). One of the ways this situation could have been effectively tackled was with the full implementation of programmes such as the Youth Guarantee, which would have targeted the youth and provided reform into structural problems (Dolado J. J., 2015). The instability, which has been felt in the labour market in general throughout Italy, has led to an increase in the emigration flow of the Italian youth (Gallo and Staniscia, 2016).

Migration is not a new phenomenon in Europe; over the past three decades, several streams of migrants, amongst them, refugees have become a part of European societies (Gattinara, 2017). The Mediterranean Sea has become one of the main migrant routes, with increasing numbers of drowned or missing people who cannot safely secure passage to land; the first stop for many though is the small island of Lampedusa which has had to strain its capacity in its centre to receive all the refugees arriving (Migration Policy Centre Europe, 2019). Many of those arriving in Italy want to continue their journey towards Northern Europe, which has created distress in the Italian-French border (ibid.). The Italian governments have acted on the migration crisis in compliance to EU-level policies, and have demanded from their EU partners common crisis management actions (Gattinara, 2017); as for Italy between 2013 and 2014 it has run the search-and-rescue Operation 'Mare Nostrum' in the Mediterranean sea (Migration Policy Centre Europe, 2019). This Operation had as its goals, "safeguarding human life at sea, and bringing to justice human traffickers and migrant smuggler" (Ministero della Difesa, 2018). A year later, in 2015 over two hundred Frontex agents and eighteen European Asylum Support Office (EASO) agents were deployed to support border management and asylum applications (Managing the Refugee Crisis - Italy: state of play report, 2015). In this year, over 150,000 migrants were smuggled by sea or land to Italy, making the country one of the main passages towards the EU (ibid.); this contributed to changes in Italian public opinion fuelled by the political approach taken and media attention, almost one in three Italians declared in this time that immigration was one of the main issues in the country (Migration Policy Centre Europe, 2019).

Indeed, Italy has transitioned to an immigration country, while Italian governments have had to deal with the various requirements of the Schengen system (Finotelli and Sciortino, 2009), this included, "take responsibility for controlling the external borders on behalf of the other Schengen States and for issuing uniform Schengen visas; efficiently cooperate with law enforcement agencies in other Schengen States in order to maintain a high level of security once border controls between Schengen countries are abolished; apply the common set of Schengen rules (the so-called

"Schengen acquis"), such as controls of land, sea and air borders (airports), issuing of visas, police cooperation and protection of personal data; and connect to and use the SIS." (Schengen Area, 2020). Since joining the Schengen Area, Italian governments have assumed the need for an active labour migration policy, but encountered several challenges in doing so, such as monitoring new entries, establishing effective internal controls and the growth of irregular migration; this is connected to a strong informal economy and expansion of a common visa policy (Finotelli and Sciortino, 2009). Although Italian policymakers tried more repressive measures, no success has been met in controlling irregular migration (ibid.).

During this time, radical-right politicians and the solidarity movements have competed with one another on how to cope with migrants inflow to Europe (Gattinara, 2017). In fact, antimigrant populist leaders and parties denounced the failure of the EU to manage its borders; this crisis became even more acute when in 2015 media attention turned to the publication of the photographs of a boy lying lifeless on a Turkish beach in September (Guiraudon, 2017). Some EU circles blamed South and Eastern European Member States, which were, in their perspective, either unwilling or unable to tackle the migration crisis; so they were proposing a two-speed Europe with only a few Schengen states moving forward on immigration, asylum and borders issues (ibid.). Concerning Italy, the migrant crisis created in its society a widespread panic, fed in existing problems related to the economic recession and the constant ongoing crisis of the Italian political system; facing this scenario, governments found it difficult to deflect from anti-immigration public opinion and populist propaganda (Gattinara, 2017).

Thus, in the last decades, Italy has been tackling its own dynamic economic demand for a growing migrant population and implementing policies that in principle, there were attempts to block the entrance and slow down the multi-ethnic transformation of its society (Ambrosini, 2013). Nevertheless, in its richer regions and cities, Italy is becoming an ever more multi-ethnic place in terms of the number of foreign residents and their participation in the labour market, as well as the joining of immigrant students in the educational system (ibid.). Still, Italian citizens would rather not recognise this new reality, being concerned with the visible formation of multi-ethnic communities (ibid.). According to a news article from BBC in 2016, Italian tolerance of its migrants' communities started to weaken following the terrorist attacks in Brussels and Paris, combined with government concerns with the refugee crisis expressed back then by the Finance Minister, Pier Carlo Padoan, "We are worried first of all from a humanitarian point of view, from a security point of view, and then of course from a financial point of view. The cost of migration has been

substantial." (Adler, 2016). As reported by the United Nations Refugee Agency in 2015, 153,842 people arrived in Italy by sea, and over 2,000 perished trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. This number increased the next year, the number of deaths doubled to 4,578 (Mediterrean Situation - Italy, 2020). In the following Figure 4, the United Nations Refugee Agency showed in 2015 where most refugees came from and where they went in Europe, the four main destinies were Italy, Greece, Malta and Spain and they originated from Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Turkey. Generally, Southern Europe has faced a constant inflow of refugees and migrants due to different conflicts, such as the Syrian war, climate change consequences and demographic change and lack of economic development in parts of the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Bolani, Gemi, and Skleparis, 2015).

Facing this scenario, the EP set out to change the Dublin System[11], recognising that it is necessary to ensure safe ways for asylum seekers to reach Europe, in this way, several reforms might be applied, such as, for instance, the creation of an EU Migration, Asylum and Protection Agency (EMAPA), eliminating incentives to non-rescue or increasing security capacity of the EU (Guild, Costello, Garlick, and Moreno-Lax, 2015). Regardless of the path, the EU and its institutions choose to follow, "the dignity and agency of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees should be respected" (ibid, pg.6).

[11] Dublin Regulation establishes the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application. Source: European Commission website, 2020

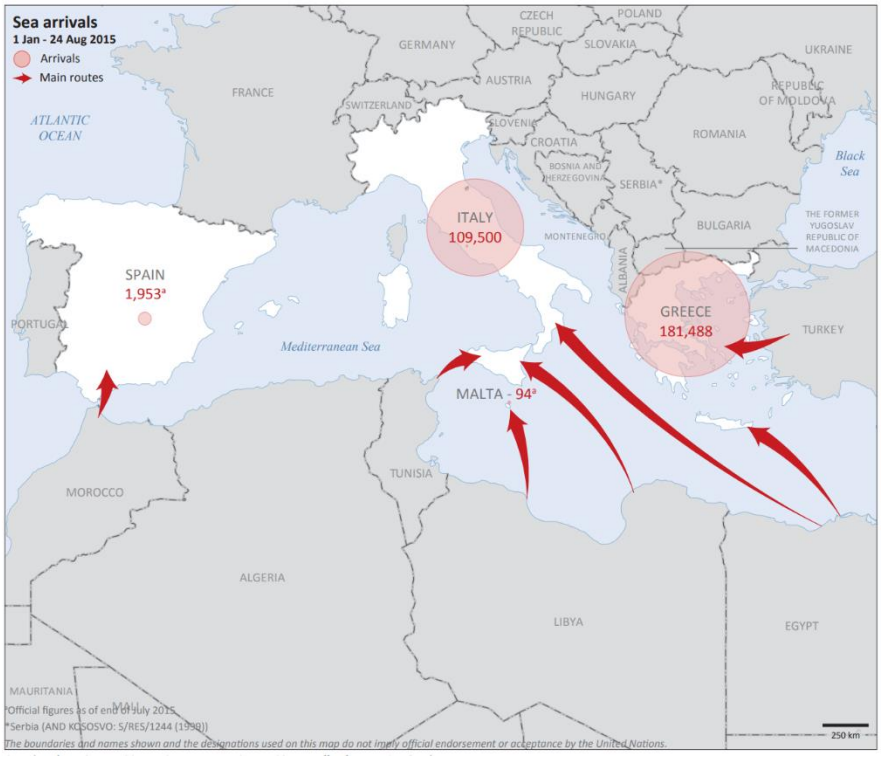

Figure 4: Sea arrivals 1 Jan – 24 Aug 2015 Creation date: 27 Aug 2015 Sources: UNHCR, UNCS

Overall, the migrant crisis in Europe has been managed based upon a state of emergency, which could lead to, "dramatic consequences for future action, shaping the way European societies cope with forthcoming crises, transforming the relationship between states and citizens, and contributing to the progressive erosion of fundamental democratic rights." (Gattinara, 2017, p. 328).

It should be noticed that different variation of crises, such as political, economic and cultural, tend to increase populist support, Italy being no exception to this (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015). These crises tend to weaken the legitimacy of the existing political forces, giving space for new political players who claim that they truly represent the people's interests and do not identify themselves with the established elites (ibid.). The swept that populist forces had in Italy and other European countries from the mid-1980s could be traced to deep transformations that have taken place, starting with the diminish of weight in economies of large-scale industries, giving way to new forms of production linked to globalisation (Tarchi, 2002). Furthermore, the nation-state slowly lost its relevance in the international stage, the economy was financed, and a shift was noticed between poorer and wealthier countries (ibid.). Because of all these events, it was seen that there 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization, creating feelings of anger and bitterness amongst people, sentiments

swiftly capitalize by populist parties who pushed for protests against the established political class, seen as responsible for the negative effects of globalization (ibidem.).

Considering the Italian case, the country proved to be a something like 'paradise' for populist forces since the late 1990s, represented by the Berlusconi governments' coalition composed of Forza Italia (FI), Alleanza Nazionale (AN), the Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro (UDC) and the Lega Nord (LN) which ruled from 2001 to 2006; the press often characterized this government as a populist one (Tarchi, 2008). According to an article by 'Foreign Policy', "In the 1990s, Berlusconi, along with the regionalist Lega Nord party, were the only real populists in town" and Berlusconi being himself a figure which represented populism, "the man who more or less invented modern populism in the West" (Foot, 2018). In general, these governments matched a description of a populist one since their leaders expressed themselves as being extraordinary and showed intolerance towards the formal rules of democracy, which they believed delayed reforms for the good of the 'ordinary people', a group which they often reference in their speeches (Tarchi, 2008). Finally, these politicians became known for attacking other class of politicians, trade unions and intellectuals, since they saw them as a factor of division in society (ibid.).

This long political cycle represented by Berlusconi's centre-right governments came to an end in 2011 with his resignation, after years of activities which were considered inefficient and corrupt, being accused of almost taking Italy to bankruptcy (Fella and Ruzza, 2013). However, Italian populism has taken many forms with different values and ideologies throughout time (ibid.). It was with the Common Man's Front and with the Northern League that populist movements appeared in Italy as mass ones, more recently this happened with the Five Star Movement (FSM) led by Beppe Grillo; in all these occasions these movements expressed political and cultural tendencies which found a voice in their representatives (Tarchi, 2015). When it comes to right-wing populism, this wing of populist forces in Italy has addressed certain issues such as migration and law and order finding resonance in the electorate concerned about them (Ruzza and Fella, 2011). It was not just the issues that the populist right addressed that made its representatives popular, but also the ownership they took of them, arising new electoral topics, like the stiff bureaucracy of the public system, the clash of interests between political elites and the population and the supranational entities, such as the EU, risking to void the legitimacy of Italian democracy (Tarchi, 2015). In fact, after Berlusconi's governments, populist forces became an inevitable component of Italy's political system, allowing for space for other populist forces to appear, such as the FSM (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2016). In 2013 parliamentary elections, 50% of voters chose parties which

could be labelled as populists; they were the FSM mentioned previously, Lega Nord, now known as Lega, and the Popolo della Libertà from Silvio Berlusconi (ibidem.). Generally, populist forces tend to be considered a threat to democracy, but it should be considered that both Lega and the FSM have attempted to unblock and reform Italy's political system (ibidem.).

Regarding the FSM, it is key to know the main characteristics of its type of populism which focus on the common people and the 'wickedness' of the political elites, not just the national ones, but also the supranational ones from EU institutions, which they observed as holding control over Italy; in this way they took advantage of the frustrations expressed by the electorate (Franzosi, Marone, and Salvati, 2015). This strategy bear fruits in the elections of 2013 being one of the most voted parties in the country reaching 25.6% in the *Camera dei Deputati* (Italy's Lower Chamber) (ibid.). The FSM appealed mainly to the youth explained by the fact that they, "are drawn to the Five-Star Movement because of its anti-establishment messages and ability to organize online" (Schultheis, 2018). Furthermore, the party through its promises of universal basic income for all Italians, reduce short-term contracts and investment of 2 billion euros in the labour market spoke directly to the concerns of the Italian youth who felt that traditional parties could not address their concerns (ibid.). On the other side of the political spectrum, the right-wing forces and their stronghold perspectives regarding law and order and migration found appeal in the electorate (Ruzza and Fella, 2011). The general characteristics of the Italian populist right could be traced as the following, "evocative rhetorical language and symbolic policies emphasising belonging and drawing boundaries, and antipolitics, directed at Rome-based politicians." (ibid.: p. 7).

When speaking about the Italian populist right, it should be touched upon the story of Lega, a party initially ruled by Umberto Bossi, which placed the Northern Italian people against Rome and its elites which, according to Lega, took advantage of the wealthiest area of Italy (Brunazzo and Gilbert, 2017). The target switched once Matteo Salvini became the party-leader, now antagonism towards the EU and its institutions became a part of the political speech; in 2019, as reported by 'The Atlantic', Salvini expressed how, "he wanted Italy to return "to what our grandparents left us"—apparently meaning the postwar economic-boom years before the euro." (Donadio, 2019). The abilities of Salvini did not stop in seizing power within his party, in 2014 during the EU elections he appealed to voters in areas in which traditionally the party did not find much support, applying an overall strategy like the one of Marie LePen in France, marking the transformation of Lega from a regional party to a populist insurgent (Brunazzo and Gilbert, 2017).

Lega's ideology sets people against the elites, who have been robbed of their identity, rights and prosperity (ibid.).

Notably, the Italian populist forces have been mutating throughout time as a reaction to the success of other populist actors in power and their institutionalization; these populist forces were a part of the changes in the Italian political system between the 1980's and the 1990's, since they supported to bring down the Christian Democratic rule during the First Republic (1942-1992) (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2016). All these changes happened during the end of the Cold War, corruption scandals and pressure coming for further European integration (ibid.). Thus, since the early 1990s, populist parties started to consolidate and establish their positions in the Italian political structure, from Berlusconi governments (ibid.) and Lega's and FSM's ascending into power in 2018, with Giuseppe Conte as prime minister (Stille, 2018). Their success in climbing to power can be traced to the effects of the Eurozone crisis in Italy, the high youth unemployment, growing poverty and inequality, and rising austerity measures coming from the EU (Fabbrini and Lazar, 2013).

Overall, the rise of these populist forces to power has compromised an equilibrium in Italian democracy, which cannot be described any longer as a consensual one based on a proportional representation of the electoral system (Fabbrini and Lazar, 2013). This became particularly noticeable following the elections of 2013 in which neither of the two logics of democracy consensual or competitive was available. The future of Italian democracy will likely depend on main party leaders' ability to reshape the entire democratic system by making it more effective and legitimate with new forged institutions (ibid.). Considering the ability of the populist coalition formed by Lega and the FSM to govern the country between 2018 and 2019, it was described back then that, "Neither party has much executive experience, and while the two may be able to paper over policy differences temporarily, neither group has ever needed to compromise their relatively extreme positions for an extended period. It's a precarious time in the Italian economy to be trying such political experiments" (Bremmer, 2018).

Ever going shifts in Italian democracy started right after 1945-1947 once it was re-established, being two key concepts when observing the turn of events crisis and change (Morlino, 1996). The party *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) led the country until entering a crisis period in 1992 and breaking down later in 1994; during their time in government with centre-left cabinets, the DC proved to be a vital part, because when a crisis erupted it only precipitated the Socialist members to leave the leadership, but the existing government could go on (ibidem.). Throughout Berlusconi

time in government the situation proved to be different when its partners in the cabinet resigned it would lead to tremendous instability and compromise the continuity of the government (ibidem.), this did not change when Lega and the FSM joined in a cabinet which lasted for fourteen months (Custodero and Rubino, 2019).

In the current Italian political context, it has been more challenging to maintain a coalition in government, and the cabinets are increasingly unstable and fragmented, making it more difficult to lead the country (Morlino, 1996). As mentioned before, other factors have contributed to the instability of Italian cabinets. T recent economic crisis has considerably affected the political system simply when regarding the transformations between 2011 and 2013 (Marangoni and Verzichelli, 2015). What emerged during this time was the breaking apart of the parliamentary model established from the past two decades and a beginning of a leadership turnover period (ibid.). The crisis reached its climax when a technocrat government lead by Mario Monti took over in 2011; this cabinet solution was supported by the European partners and the President of the Italian Republic (ibid.), his technical government would kick-off reforms in a package named "Save Italy", (The Economist, 2012). Although many Italians found almost unbelievable that a figure as Berlusconi had left the political sphere, "Some young Italians, who increasingly feel shut out by a labour market that protects older workers, considered his departure to be good sign." (Donadio, 2011).

The economic crisis did not only provoke changes in the political spectrum but also modified the perceptions on the economy by Italian voters, by the 2013 elections half of the electorate lived with some type of job difficulty; almost all considered the state of the economy 'bad' and many expressed a negative view on the future of their country, allocating the blame of it all in their political representatives (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2014). The economic crisis coincided with the end of the Second Republic in Italy and the rise of a technocratic government; these circumstances led to a decline in voter turnout, abstention became a way to show discontent; also embedded in alienation and indifference, but those who perceived their political incumbents "negatively were more likely to have chosen Beppe Grillo's movement" seen as, "an alternative for many citizens unhappy with the economy" (ibid.: p.155). Furthermore, since 2013 EU integration became an axis of competition, economic and migration policies became less relevant and EU authority topics gained relevance within the electorate, this is also related to the appearance in the political scenery of parties like the FSM (Giannetti, Pedrazzani, and Pinto, 2017). The electoral protest present in Italy and the demand for radical solutions for complex domestic problems, increased the already

complex circumstances in Italy (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2014). By 2014, 'The Spectator' described Italy as, "the sick man of Europe — and it is also the dying man of Europe." (Farrell, 2014).

Thus, the economic crisis has weakened democratic institutions in the EU Member States such as Italy where the negative economic performance has endured through time, compromising the trust in politics and parties, which has led to governing instability (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2014). During this time, abstention served an exit way for the discontented electorate, which by not voting expressed their antipathy towards the political establishment and their negative evaluation of the country's economy (ibid.). However, many displeased people preferred to vote in radical parties such as the Five-Star Movement, simply young people, instead of abstaining (ibid.) Indeed, the government austerity measures that were implemented on the aftermath of the crisis placed a heavier burden on the young, with lower budgets for education, higher university tuition fees and fewer services as youth centres (Sloam, 2013). During this time, mass youth protests swept Europe (ibid.). This also included Italy, wherein 2010, the capital was filled with students protesting the educational reform package supported by the Berlusconi government (Jennings, 2010). For decades, young people have been excluded from Italian politics by its elite, a system which has been saturated with corruption and nepotism (Sloam, 2014). Overall, according to Passarelli and Tuorto, the "emergence of a new, radically anti-establishment party on the Italian political scene reflects a more complex need for a political 'exit' that is supported by many voters who are responsive to (and ready to vote for) an alternative instead of abstaining" (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2014, pp. 156-157).

Moreover, the effects of the financial and economic crisis, changed the Italian view on Europe, breaking the trust Italians had in Europe as a source of assured prosperity and economic growth, this change of perception was quite noticeable in the centre-left electorate, while the right-wing voters kept being critical on the subject (Mauro, 2014). In fact, the adverse economic situation increased diffuse opposition (attitudes directed to the whole system) towards Europe, in particular against the national government and created doubts of the benefits connected to be a Member State, but it did not affect the sense of belonging in Europe in Italians (ibid.). Linked to this, there has also been a concern of lack of civic and political engagement amongst the Italian youth, when overlooking this topic into more detailed, it is noticed that young people prefer other forms of participation, since they do not see concrete results coming from direct political participation (Villano and Bertocchi, 2014). When it comes to the EU, young people still feel its values and institutions are distant from them, which compromises civic and political engagement, this could

be blamed on the inability of the EU to promote itself amongst this group, thus it is necessary "an improvement of communication between the political representatives and young people" (ibid.: 97). Indeed, in the ESN Survey in 2019, most respondents[12] admitted that they did not feel informed enough about the work of the EP (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Nonetheless, when it comes to European elections, most respondents (60%) stated it was important for them to vote on those elections (ibid.). This high interest was translated in considerable voter turnout in the elections that year with 68,77% among Erasmus students (ibid.).

In general terms, young Italians tend to show a higher interest for politics than their European counterparts; this does not mean that they do not have a critical judgement on the practices of some members of the political establishment (Bontempi, 2008). Italian youth engages in politics both by showing up in the ballot and by challenging the traditional limits of political participation and choosing different types of it to express their views; with the combination of the two different types of practices, there has been a change in Italy of what it means to be politically active (ibid.). Among the several causes affecting youth political participation in Italy, difficulties entering and participating in the labour market are amongst them (Baglioni, Colloca, and Theiss, 2015). Indeed, "young people facing difficult circumstances, such as unemployment, can generate a resilient attitude and engage in political mobilization." (ibid.: p. 771). Youth political activism is nurtured by several goals which support disadvantaged groups and the meeting of the needs of people involved in these movements and/or groups, even when facing economic uncertainties, youth attempts by non-conventional political acts to start building a more equitable and resilient socio-economic system and try to do so together, "participation becomes a means of social change" (Luigi, Martelli, and Pitti, 2018, p. 267). Membership in associations and groups can foster young people's political participation in vulnerable situations, such as unemployment, in this way political engagement is facilitated, avoiding some consequences associated with lack of employment such as apathy towards politics (Baglioni, Colloca, and Theiss, 2015).

The crisis of political participation among Italian youth, concerning during the 1990s, has been replaced in a higher involvement in specific spheres that exclude conventional participation, such as party membership and voting (Gozzo, 2014). In fact, youth involvement has been increasing in demonstrations, rallies, and political debates, which has been partially fuelled by web usage and strong reactions to economic inequalities (ibid.). On the other side, according to Gozzo, party membership and voting have remained stable or decreased. What has been observed is that

[12] Concerning the characteristics of the participants of the ESN Survey 2019, 4,729 (31,57%) had Italy as their country of citizenship.

“Young people opt for direct involvement thanks also to the encouragement of adults and, in a tense political climate, they ask for answers or work to improve their condition”, there is a similar tendency when university students are analysed, who show a greater tendency towards acts of self-determined participation (ibidem.: p. 221). According to the same source, young Italian voters appear to acquire more skills as political participants.

Indeed, when looking at data which focus on Italian Erasmus students’ political participation in the European sphere, more than half have confirmed they have participated in political debates, 44,84% had joined public demonstrations, 66,41% had signed a petition and 35% had expressed their views on public matters on the internet or in social media platforms (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Concerning their views on the EU, Italian Erasmus students show to be the amongst the most protective of it and that feeling of support expresses itself into higher interest on the European project, higher intentions to vote and higher voter participation in European elections when compared to the European average, viewing their vote as a way to influence politics (ibid.). In short, a possible way to actively involve more Italian young people in politics in the future would be for Europe not to appear as a ‘restrain jacket’ or an ‘absent protagonist’, which could help to bring back politics to the core of Europe and EU as the main topic in Italian domestic politics (Gozi, Generazione Erasmus al potere, 2016).

CHAPTER 4
Youth public attitudes and political participation in Spain and Italy

Nationalism and egotism should no longer have a position in Europe tolerance and solidarity represent our common future. And colleagues it is well well worth fighting for them.

- Angela Merkel, German Federal Chancellor on the Future of Europe during the plenary session in Strasbourg (12-15/11/2018)

4.1 Public attitudes of young people towards the EU in Spain and Italy: a comparison on what might have affected youth political participation

There have been conducted other studies on two mechanisms that build the inside dynamic of the European public sphere. The first one is a rise in communication within European political institutions, this meaning institutional actors, experts and representatives of civil society. The second one is an increase in the public's attention and awareness of European political communication when considering governance (Trenz and Eder, 2004). The new path towards political integration, which began with the Maastricht Treaty cultivated the search for public legitimacy as a source of European power; thus political actors had to consider the possible public reactions to their strategies and actions (ibid.). However, in the case the public remains indifferent, collective actors in Europe must seek ways to capture their attention for their activities, thus "the principal objective of a European communication policy is not to improve information, but to present it." (ibid.: p.16).

Generally, the conventional wisdom presents political elites as more favourable to European integration than it is the public opinion, but when looking into this matter concretely elites and the public seek for different things from Europe (Hooghe, 2003). Elites look for an EU with the capability of governing a competitive market and show political strength, while the public seeks an EU which would protect them from the fluctuations of capitalist markets, being more of their interest policies regarding employment, social and cohesion improvements, environment and industry (ibid.). Moreover, "The growing public perception of the EU appears to be important to this democratic expansion and convergence, as is the role of the institutions in performing European governance and encouraging communication and discourse.", even with developments that might not always be perceived as positive and criticisms that might arise from it, it also comes with an increase of communication which fosters democratic mechanisms, being this "a process that unfolds in the course of deepening integration." (Trenz and Eder, 2004, p. 20).

Indeed, public attitudes over mass political behaviour are responsible for shaping and building European integration, one example of this could be the Danish referendum in 1992 over the Maastricht Treaty which ultimately changed the institutional reform the EU went through (Gabel, 1998). There have been studied five explanations for public support of European integration (ibid.):

1) Cognitive mobilization, which argued that high cognitive mobilization led to political awareness and good skills in political communication allowing for citizens to identify themselves with a supranational political community such as the EU;
2) Political Values, according to this theory citizens' political attitudes are moulded by the socioeconomic conditions which they have during their formative years;
3) Utilitarian model, EU citizens through their unique socioeconomic experiences, perceive the EU's costs and benefits of integration differently, thus their support for further integration is connected to their possible welfare gains that arise with it;
4) Class partisanship, which defends that left parties supporters were more sceptical towards European integration than the ones from right-wing parties;
5) Support for government, citizens project their evaluations of the national party leaders towards the supranational levels.

When analysing all the previous described theories there are differences in their significance, but the utilitarian one proves to be the most robust in predicting support for European integration, nonetheless, it is important to notice that, "citizen's support for integration is (at least potentially) flexible." (ibid.: p. 352). In fact, the selected respondents of the ESN Survey 2019 when questioned what strengthened their feeling of being European citizen, the top five replies were: the fact they could live anywhere in the EU after retirement and being able to get their pension; a European social welfare system harmonised amongst the Member States; the recognition of academic studies throughout the EU; European civic education classes which begin in the early years of education; and finally the European emergency services (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019).

Focusing now on the topic of youth political participation, the turnout in general elections has declined and the same trend has been followed by membership of political parties; some

studies have even described the youth as politically apathetic or inactive (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003). This lack of political participation of youth could be linked to the incapacity of the political representatives and structures to tackle the issues which concern young people or even to find a way to make politics an essential part of their lives, "The problem, however, may not merely be that young people no longer listen to politicians, but that young people perceive that politicians do not listen to them" (ibid.: p. 59). Moreover, the youth may avoid formal politics since they do not see what it has to offer them, choosing instead to participate in other ways, for instance, through demonstrations (ibid.). Nevertheless, according to the same source, it is vital when evaluating the lack of youth political participation not basing it entirely on lack of interest in politics, but also extend our analysis beyond this and search for other possible reasons. Indeed, we should be aware that in a report from 2019 produced by the EC showed that in those elections young and first-time voters drove turnout figures to the record high; this was also the most digital to-date elections in which almost half of EU citizens now rely on online news as their primary source for information about national and European politics (Commission reports on 2019 European elections: fostering European debates, 2020).

The wearing out of Southern European democracies and their support for the EU could be traced for the way the euro was implemented, with the clear goals of allowing EU member states to more easily converge their national interests, eventually grow into a greater political union, and finally form a liberal-democratic zone of stability (Matthijs, 2014). Until the start of the crisis in 2010, Spain had a strong employment growth which accounted for more than 40% of all jobs created in the Eurozone until 2007 and in the case of Italy the decline of the employment rate in this period was less than 1% until 2009 (Perez, 2013-2014). Many viewed later the negative consequences of the crisis in Italy and Spain as a shortcoming of their labour market systems and social protection and the supposed excesses committed within them (ibid.).

However, by 2010 the disappointment on the promises of Maastricht were exposed with the sovereign-debt crisis, which reached Spain and Italy just one year later, forcing economic adjustments (Matthijs, 2014). These economic regulations showed the unequal grounds in which Southern European countries and Northern European countries stood and their clashing interests, creating a unique opportunity for protest politics and extremists throughout the political spectrum to appear and strive (ibid.). Moreover, it exposed the macro-institutional defects of the Eurozone, "These flaws include the absence of a confirmed lender of last resort for governments and banks, the lack of real time banking union (including a common resolution fund and deposit guarantee),

and the absence of mutualizing public debt instruments with a collective guarantee that could redress the perception of sovereign default and/or redenomination risks," (Perez, 2013-2014, p. 41). Considered too large to simply be bailed out, governments had to implement harsh austerity measures, recommended by Brussels to appease the bond markets this ultimately led to spending cuts directed mostly to education, health care and other public investments and substantial fiscal adjustment efforts were required (ibid.). Until that point, there had not been such a massive fiscal adjustment in democracies guided by a supranational organization such as the EU, together with the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank (Matthijs, 2014). This damaged the domestic political legitimacy both in Spain and Italy since they could not control major economic-political choices, exposing the inability of their traditional parties to tackle the challenges presented (ibid.). The governments which followed in Spain and Italy were mostly incapable of acting long-lasting reforms in the labour market and social spending to support economic recovery, short-term solutions for keeping employment and increasing productivity were preferred; all this in a Eurozone context which has not available tools to prevent similar financial crisis, creating a risk of political instability and social discontent (Perez, 2013-2014).

In fact, student movements in Italy and Spain arose between 2008 and 2010 around the concepts of precarity, youth and anti-austerity discourse, and they influenced the neoliberal trend during the time of economic crisis (Zamponi and González, 2016). These student movements, which could already be traced before the economic crisis, contributed for anti-austerity protests in Italy and Spain, which gained a wider audience during this time and mobilised more people than before (ibid.). There were differences between these protest movements, in Spain youth mostly united to the 15-M joining transversal anti-austerity movements, while in Italy they joined different type of mobilisations; with the platform 'Juventud Sin Futuro', which appeared in 2011 thousands of young people flooded the streets of Madrid with the slogan behind them of 'no house, no job, no pension, no fear', in the Italian case more scattered anti-austerity movements appeared in which the youth joined (ibid.). Overall, the way these movements progressed and adapted during the time of crisis was mostly influenced by the different experiences of it lived by the youth in public discourse, "the influence of a dissenting youth was also key in order to open the field of opportunities for broader mobilisations." (ibid.: p. 77).

Generally, young people have been disappointed with the traditional forms of politics and there have been debates and concerns on youth's apathetic attitudes towards their participation within the established political system (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010). Beyond this, it must be

recognized how even though there are some young people, as there are adults, who do not have any kind of interest in politics, but many among the youth started forging new protest techniques other still used more common individualized ways, showing youth participation as a complex subject (ibidem.). Furthermore, youth still searches for recognition by state actors and value democracy, seeming to prefer 'ordinary' daily political practices, what might be called, "doing their part" (ibidem.). It is possible then to say that "Young Europeans have become increasingly alienated from parties and politicians, but are active in 'politics' in a broader sense." (Sloam, 2013, p. 850). This could be a reflection of the times which have changed together with young people's values and lifestyle, and politics proved unable to accompany this (ibid.). Youth participation in politics has changed, they prefer issue-based forms of engagement and have little contact with decision-makers, they would instead sign public petitions and join demonstrations (ibid.), as was also observed in reports such as the ESN Survey 2019.

Undeniably, we should tackle political marginalisation in youth, simply when comparing differences between unemployed youth and employed youth, those who hold a job have a greater disposition to discuss political matters, even though both employed and unemployed show a low interest in EU political topics (Bay and Blekesaune, 2003). Moreover, those who do not have a job tend to have more radical political attitudes; they particularly differentiate themselves from employed youth by their lack of political confidence and their dissatisfaction on the function of democracy, this is related to the inaction of public authorities regarding their state of unemployment (ibid.). In Italy's case, for instance, where high youth unemployment can be found, the situation between those who have a job and those who do not becomes somewhat normalised, being those satisfied with the present state of politics the exceptional group (ibid.). It should then be noted that social inequalities could determine political participation with factors such as educational attainment and household income, for instance, young people from poorer backgrounds tend to have higher levels of political participation through, for example, working for a party or joining a boycott (Sloam, 2013). Overall, youth participation in democracy within the EU is diverse and expresses itself in different ways, but two dangers could be traced, which are the disconnection from young people from electoral politics and the lack of contact with public activities that affect their daily lives, on top of all of this if the socio-economic inequalities are allowed to grow they will provoke greater unbalances in political participation (ibid.).

Young people have been disproportionally affected by the 2008 global financial crisis, and due to the particular time in their lives they are, the so-called 'impressionable years' and entering

for the first time the labour market, it can be said that a considerable mark was made on them (Grasso, 2018). In fact, the crisis made the Spanish and Italian labour market experience high levels of unemployment; also there has been a reduction in equivalized household income, worse levels of inequality, higher levels of poverty connected to the increased unemployment rate (Addabbo, García-Fernández, Llorca-Rodríguez, and Maccagnan, 2011). In general, Southern Europe has been in the frontline of the Eurozone debt crisis, which represented the most significant existential crisis for the European Monetary Union until that point (Hopkin, 2015). The response which followed focused mostly on the supposed policy errors and historical institutional vulnerabilities of Southern Europe, so an austere fiscal policy was set as a road for solution, but even if countries like Italy impose all the structural reforms prescribed growth would be unlikely (ibid.).

Before the eruption of the crisis certain conditions were being built that made countries such as Italy and Spain more vulnerable to it; amongst these were the high unit labour costs in comparison to countries like Germany, but without a real rise on wages (ibid.). According to the same source, in Italy with the Berlusconi government labour protection diminished, in the Spanish case a housing bubble provoked over-investments, leading to an increase in demand for low-skilled workers, this translated in a rise in immigration and low need of high levels of education. Moreover, the crisis also meant a new political scenario in Southern Europe, "the elections held since the crisis began have brought major transformations to what were relatively settled patterns of citizen representation and party competition" (ibid.: p. 21). There was the desire for something distinct, "more transparent forms of politics and greater use of direct democracy; an end to austerity and an investment in measures to boost youth employment; government regulation of 'corporate greed'; and, the implementation of measures to address socio-economic inequalities" (Sloam, 2014, p. 221).

With the shifts and changes that have happened in Southern Europe, simply in Italy and Spain, there have also been raising concerns with the low number of young people voting in the EP elections or even local elections, the lack of youth membership in political parties, trade unions or youth organisations (Kovacheva, 2005). It should be acknowledged that political participation is not a static concept, it has changed together with society and scientific research on it, and more recent developments are strongly linked with youth behaviour and values (ibid.). Thus, political participation involves, "all those political activities that citizen can become involved in as they to attempt to influence political decision-making" (Grasso, 2018, p. 181). Concerning this, several

transformations have occurred in recent times which have shaped youth political participation. When youth feels democracy being threatened they go in high numbers to vote, this high inflow in the ballot boxes tends to be connected unconventional and civic activities focused on single issues, like the protests against the war in Iraq or environmental concerns (Kovacheva, 2005). Also, the high spread of consumerism poses a challenge to civic participation since it creates a distance to collective solidarity and ideological engagement (ibid.). According to Kovachea, the spread of individualisation as a trend has also been seen as an impediment to formal youth participation in youth organisations with regularity. Finally, mobility within Europe tends to provoke civic engagement in youth, but while urban areas experience an increase of multiculturalism, rural areas remain more isolated (ibid.). Indeed, political participation is a fundamental part of democracy and for effective representation, but some scholars have argued that young people have turned away from formal politics, such as voting and party membership, and have shown a preference for new social movements and protest (Grasso, 2018). This is also connected to the value change provoked by social and economic transformation, so we have seen a rise of postmaterialist values and politics of young Europeans has become more diverse, "because postmaterialists tend towards lifestyle politics, and are much more likely than materialists to engage in non-electoral, non-institutionalised forms of politics, such as signing a petition, joining a boycott and participating in a demonstration" (Sloam, 2013, p. 841).

In fact, when approached about what should be the priorities for the EU for the next decade, young people (15-30 years old) have placed protecting the environment and tackling climate change as the priority, followed by improvement of education and training, the fight of poverty and economic and social inequalities, and lastly increasing employment (European Commission, 2019). Concerning social and civic participation 72% of the young people inquired say they have voted in local, national, and European elections and three in four of them actively engaged in some form of organised movement or volunteering, for instance, strikes or student organisations (ibid.). Indeed, youth political participation could be described as, "not only the action structured through political institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also involvement in less structured, looser networks and friendship circles, and even individual action, such as political consumerism." (Kovacheva, 2005, p. 27).

When questioning young people (15-30 years old) about how to build a stronger and more united Europe, almost half pointed how education systems should prepare them for employment, 45% believed that everyone should have a chance to succeed, to contribute to this critical thinking,

media, democracy, climate change and environmental topics, as well as, entrepreneurship and financial abilities should be taught in schools (Flash Eurobarometer 478 – "How do we build a stronger more united Europe? The views of young people"., 2019). Among youth, 31% have stayed abroad for some amount of time, this is more likely if they possess higher levels of education, live in large cities or are involved in volunteer activities when questioning those who did not do this lack of finances, personal issues, low interest and information; also insufficient language skills were presents as reasons (ibid.). In fact, financial burdens remain the main obstacle to mobility, those who have lower education levels perceive the barriers for mobility to be even higher, but more than half who chose to continue their studies in another country used EU funding programmes (Hauschildt, Voegtle, and Gwosc, 2018).

Taking what has been put forward, it can be said that youth political participation and engagement is a complex subject with many facets, "In political activities other than voting, college-educated citizens participate at approximately double the rate of those who left school with no formal qualification (...) young people from the poorest households are relatively engaged in these (mostly) protest activities (...) youth participation in democracy (...) be both vibrant and diverse." (Sloam, 2013, p. 852). Even though it has been a concern the lack of showing up of youth in voting ballots, it does not translate, even in times of crisis necessarily a lack of general interest, but instead an, "eschew traditional participation because they do not feel heard." (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010, p. 28). Nonetheless, the disengagement of young people from formal politics has created some concerns, since their lack of political participation threatens the legitimacy of democratic systems; still, voting remains the most common mode of participation (Grasso, 2018). On the other hand, some young people have gone for non-mainstream forms of participation, such as boycotts and protests, and with the rise of digital technology and social media the ways youth expresses itself politically and even participates has changed considerably, "the rise of lifestyle politics twinned with the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter has encouraged young people to construct their own sense of community through the internet often based around identity politics" (ibid.: p. 189). Finally, we should safeguard the possibility that as young people grow up, they might become more politically active and increase their turnout in elections (ibid.).

4.2 The Erasmus Programme and youth public attitudes and political participation in Spain and Italy

It should be recognised that student mobility is not a new phenomenon it happened both in medieval and in the 20th century, students conducted their studies in foreign universities and

travelled throughout Europe, the Erasmus Programme, however changed this by overcoming obstacles associated with international student mobility and creating a more secure environment to do so (Teichler, 1996). The programme was officially launched in 1987, and this symbolised the start of a new chapter for internationalisation in HE; this was done to have experienced university students in cooperation within Europe, to strengthen the interaction between Member States, to build up on the concept of People's Europe and, finally, to increase cooperation amongst higher education institutions (Maiworm, 2001). Globalisation has been responsible for changes in many sectors of our lives, such as the economy, international business, social relationships, culture, and politics (Aktan and Sari, 2010). Education has been no exception to this. Global politics principles have been in the core of the Erasmus project's development, responsible for providing exchanges for students and professors within universities and recognise their studies and work officially (ibid.). Briefly, the main characteristics of the Erasmus Programme could be described as it follows it follows (Maiworm, 2001):

- The support of regional mobility between European countries;
- Promotion of temporary study abroad with, for example, giving grants to applicants;
- Sponsors mobility and cooperation within educational institutions;
- Supports curricular integration;
- Recognition of academic achievements done abroad.

Furthermore, the Erasmus Programme intends to improve its participants' skills and competences to have a higher qualified workforce, further develop a modern educational system and settle Europe's position as a knowledge base economy (Breznik, Skrbinjek, Law, and Đaković, 2013). To achieve all of this, the Programme has been expanding throughout the years in scope and contribution, always creating new ways to stimulate cooperation and support in higher education (ibid.). In fact, Europe has given considerable boosts and set many transformations to successive Erasmus programmes, which have come throughout time (González, Mesanza, and Mariel, 2011).

Besides the central role of the Programme which focus on student mobility, there has been some evidence that by studying abroad young people are better at coping with the constant changes of an international world, in addition to this the Erasmus Programme supports the creation of a sense of European identity and citizenship (ibid.).

Generally, most students who join the Programme have as their main reasons to do so the experience to live in another country, meet new people, learn, or improve a foreign language and develop soft skills, but it is essential to acknowledge that an Erasmus grant plays a relevant role, simply in Southern Europe where 53% of students admit that lack of financial support prevents them from being a part of the Erasmus Programme (Brandenburg and Petrova, 2016). Moreover, by joining the programme students increase their employability rates, foster their entrepreneurship spirit, also mobile students are more likely to hold in the future a management position after five to ten years of graduating (ibid.). Besides this, Erasmus students also notice a positive change in personality traits and feel closer and more related to Europe than their non-mobile counterparts, interestingly 32% of students admit having a partner of a different nationality of their own (ibid.). Finally, according to Brandenburg and Petrova, European attitudes are reinforced during mobility; this is particularly noticeable in Southern Europe with a percentage of 85%.

The Erasmus Programme has succeeded in inspiring students all over Europe to proceed their studies in different countries and learn other languages (Teichler, 1996). Indeed, one of the programme's greatest achievements has been, "in creating or reinforcing a favourable climate for temporary study abroad" (ibid.: p. 177).

Even with the developments of the Erasmus Programme that have happened through the years it is challenging to assess the programme's impact as a whole and simply in the voting behaviours of their young participants. It is precisely this facet of the Programme being ever changing and the different actors with multiple priorities who built it that makes it a difficult object to evaluate, "certain level of vagueness about what exactly it is expected to achieve" (Wilson, 2011, p. 1128). In trying to change the future behaviour of its participants and their views and attitudes towards the EU, it is important that they generate an impact, some sort of material benefits that is hard to guarantee (ibid.). Being a part of the Erasmus Programme does not necessarily produce a significant shift throughout time and make its students more pro-European, there were not detected revolutionary changes in their system of beliefs from the start to the end of their international experience; but it is important to be careful in generalizing these results since they might not represent the long-term results of the Erasmus Programme or the majority of the student community who joins it (ibid.). Additional to this, there is no concrete evidence that being emerged in an international environment leads to change in identification patterns within Erasmus

participants, “higher education students already are a positively selected group regarding their identification with Europe” (Mol, 2018, p. 461).

Nevertheless, one should not put aside the Erasmus Programme all altogether since it fosters the learning of foreign languages, awareness of different cultures, the spread of policy and entrepreneur ideas, as well as access to learning opportunities unavailable in one’s home country (Wilson, 2011). A study conducted from a Spanish University empirical point of view, showed that students who studied in another country develop skills to study and work in a culturally diverse and different environment (Urquía-Grande and Campo, 2016). Regarding Italy, the country follows a similar trend, a work conducted in 2019 indicated that international student mobility does support greater career progression (Schnepf and D’Hombres, 2019). In fact, three to four years after graduation, Italian postgraduates benefit from higher employment compared to their non-mobile counterparts (ibid.).

It should be recognised Erasmus+ students become even more pro-European after concluding their mobility period simply if this sentiment is not substantial prior to the mobility period, being the most significant gains detected with students from Eastern and Southern Europe (Souto-Otero, 2019). Moving forward, at least 90% of young Europeans considered experiences abroad important even though a majority saw space for improvement, from the creation of EU degrees and the opportunity to work in innovative projects (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2018). By joining the Erasmus Programme, its young participants also increase their employability; students from Eastern and Southern Europe are those who highlight the most the benefits it has brought to their careers; they also tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and more open for an international career, being able to find work faster than their non-mobile colleagues (Souto-Otero, 2019). In terms of their personalities, attitudes and behaviour Erasmus students experience positive personal growth and greater cultural and social openness, in general, it can be stated that “Erasmus+ participation was reported as enriching academically, socially, personally, and in terms of the development of employability.” (ibid.: p. 181).

Students from Italy and Spain have had the opportunity to experience all this that has been described previously, their number of outgoing participants have been similar since the start of the Erasmus Programme, which has shown in both countries a tendency to increase as presented in the graphic below (Figure 6); also students from Italy and Spain seem to favour these countries as

Erasmus destinations several factors influenced their choice such as language and perceived cultural proximity (Pumares, González-Martín, Montanari, and Staniscia, 2018).

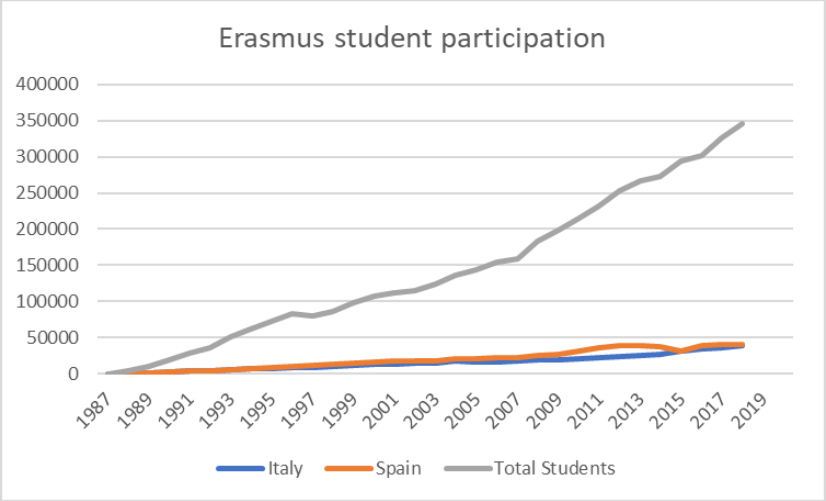

Figure 5 - Erasmus students' evolution in outgoing participation with focus in Italy & Spain. Source: Eurobarometer

Both scholar and policy-makers have put a lot of hopes in the role the Erasmus Programme as a way to foster and create a common identity among Europeans as well as increase support towards the EU; it was expected that "by living, working and studying together, Europeans become aware of their commonalities and develop a supranational identity" (Kuhn, 2012, p. 994). Indeed, one of the Erasmus Programme's original goals when it was created was to promote interactions among young Europeans (Sigalas, 2010). However, studies have shown that this is not the case and that the Erasmus produces little effects on both fronts, the mobility programme appears to be 'preaching to the converted', this meaning that the higher education students for multiple reasons tend to be pro-EU and only feel more so when joining the Erasmus Programme (Kuhn, 2012). Taking this into account, that *a priori* Erasmus young participants are more favourable towards the EU it makes it difficult to assess the impact of the Programme on students' views and preferences (Mol, 2013).

On the other hand, low-educated youth is very unlikely to show high support for the EU and indeed if they had the opportunity to join a mobility international programme such as Erasmus it could be the turning point, but they leave school before many of these programmes take place (ibid.). Also, even when joining the Programme, the effects on EU support can remain limited, since high quality interactions tend to occur mostly between co-nationals and some students faced adaptation problems (Sigalas, 2010). Moreover, when interactions do happen amongst students of different nationalities, the results on EU support tend to remain limited (ibid.). It should also be

considered that these phenomenon's may have a regional variation, in the Italian case there were notable differences between mobile and non-mobile youth, this could be explained by the fact that this generation grew in a reality where the EU already existed as such and had always been present and everyday they experience the consequences of EU membership (Mol, 2013). It could be viewed that "a study period abroad adds new layers to students' perception of 'Europe'", since mobile students take the EU as their personal project, turning it into a personal project in which social characteristics out win the political ones (ibid.: p. 220).

In general, support for the European project and youth political participation has been of growing importance and received considerable attention in the last years (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003). In 2014 a study entitled 'Erasmus Voting Assessment' (EVA) had the goal to evaluate if the Erasmus Programme could lead to greater youth participation in European elections and more support for the EU (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014). What was assessed was that EVA respondents tended to identify themselves with the EU, 91% see themselves as nationals of their countries and as European citizens; they also appeared to connect positive views with the EU more than other young people (ibid.). Moreover, they tended to be better informed about how European members of Parliament are elected, even though 30% were not aware that they were elected directly by citizens, finally they saw the EP as a key element in the construction of the EU (ibid.). According to the same study, with regards to the voting intentions and behaviour, the level of participation in the EU elections of that year (2014) varied in EVA participants in accordance with their Erasmus experience[13]; those who had had an Erasmus experience at the time showed greater levels of participation in EU elections.

However, how it has been pointed out before we should dwell further on the concept of 'political participation' simply when talking about youth and try to include in our analysis intentions of voting and the interpretations of that, an example could be deliberating abstention of voting in elections, something which tends to be understood as apathy (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003). Indeed, indifference could be theoretically viewed as a simple model of behaviour, by this is meant that if voting led to a result, which would not make a difference, and assuming that voting involves costs, the rational citizen would choose not to vote (Brody and Page, 1973). Thus, non-participation can have various reasons which surpasses the simple assumption that this happens due to lack of interest in politics, "The problem, however, may not merely be that

[13] 81% of EVA respondents who were former Erasmus students; 74% of EVA respondents never studied abroad (but would like to do so); and 41% of EVA respondents who were back then Erasmus students

young people no longer listen to politicians, but that young people perceive that politicians do not listen to them", political literacy should then not just be bottom-up, but also top-down (O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003, p. 59). We could also consider that politics not only incorporates formal political participation, but it is also about social empowerment (Favell, 2010). This empowerment has also with the participation in the Erasmus Programme, "Their mobilities increased their technical, interpersonal and inter-cultural skills and competences, as well as their self-confidence, ability to achieve goals, and social and cultural openness" (Souto-Otero, 2019, p. 1).

Indeed, the crisis might have been in itself a catalyser for youth political action with an increase in protest movements against austerity and spending cuts in social services, yet these movements seem to attract a small proportion of participants, who are often ignored by mainstream political parties since they are viewed as unlikely to vote (Grasso, 2018). Education levels (higher education levels tend to be connected to greater political participation), ideological identification, and satisfaction with the way democracy works and other political values also play a role in the shift of levels of political involvement (ibid.). As for Italy, difficulties entering and participating in the labour market are among the causes of influencing youth political participation (Baglioni, Colloca, and Theiss, 2015). In Spain youth's negative evaluation of the socio-economic context post-2008 shaped their political action, young people between 18 and 24 years old showed to have higher abstention rate levels, being this a way to express their discontent and distrust of incumbent politicians (Jover, Belando-Montoro, and Guío, 2014).

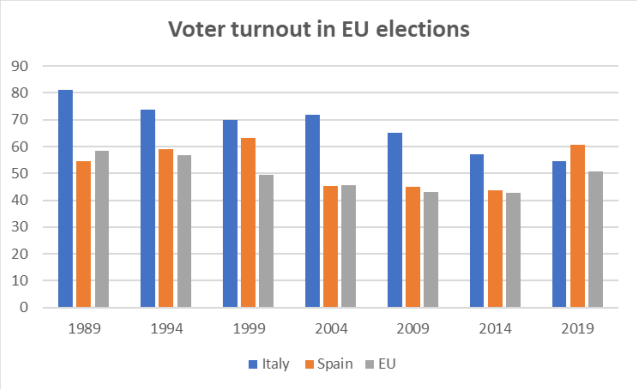

Figure 6 - Voter turnout in EU elections between 1989 & 2019. Source: Eurobarometer

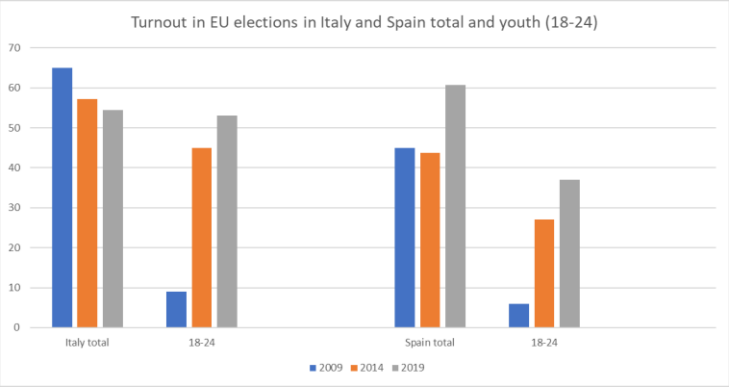

Figure 7 - Youth voter turnout in EU elections 2009, 2014 & 2019. Source: Eurobarometer

We can analyse in Figure 7 that overall turnout in EU elections in Italy and Spain has oscillated throughout time with a tendency to have lowered since the '80s, simply in the Italian

case, Spain presents higher levels of fluctuation, it is noticeable some spikes in participation in 1999 and 2019.

On the other hand, when focusing on available data only of youth (18 to 24 years old) voter turnout in Spain and Italy in EU elections (Figure 8[14]), for both countries there has been an increase in youth political participation simply when putting it in comparison with the total of voter turnout. In Spain between 2014 and 2019 there was an increase of 10% (from 27% to 37%) and in Italy a similar trend was found with an increment of 8% (from 45% to 53%). It is important to point out though that the previously described chart (Figure 8) shows only youth voter turnout in EU elections, not the Erasmus students who were eligible to vote those years. In 2019 through the ESN Survey we can obtain a view of participation of Erasmus as voters in the European elections, not only to they have a higher interest in these elections, they also show a higher presence in the ballot of that year; even if only 30% of respondents admitted feeling very or quite informed about the EP's work (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). It should be recognized that there is still a lack of data on youth's democratic participation connected to joining the Erasmus Programme. Thus, it was attempted for this research to include all relevant election data. Nonetheless, without further investigation on the short and long term impact of the Erasmus Programme, it would be challenging to make a final statement on the Programme's ultimate influence on the voting behaviour and support of the EU in its young participants in Spain and in Italy.

Concerning Erasmus students' political engagement and participation, several studies have been conducted to include students from Italy and Spain. In the latest ESN Survey from 2019, when respondents were questioned on why they did not vote in the 2019 EU elections, technical reasons were mainly presented to justify their abstention, for instance the inability to go back to their home country to cast a vote and difficulties with registration and voting while abroad (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). It is worth noting that students who have participated in an EU funded exchange programme, such as the Erasmus+, give higher importance to EU elections (60,69%), have greater intentions to vote in them (76,18%) and had greater turnout in those elections (71,20% in 2019) when compared to the European average of the younger population (18-30 years old) (ibid.). During the previous 2014 European elections, 81% of EVA respondents who had completed their stay abroad admitted to voting on those elections (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014). As pro-European feelings of young people increase, participation

[14] It should be noted that the data from 2009 does not examine the turnout rate amongst 18-24 year olds, but rather the share of 18-24 year olds on the total voter turnout in the respective country

in elections for the EP tend also to be greater; this feeling shows to be linked to a specific interest in EU issues and information on the electoral process (Díaz, 2008). Indeed, students who had the 'Erasmus experience' are more positive about the EU and have their participation in the exchange programme as the major factor influencing their voting behaviour in EU elections, increasing the possibilities of them voting (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014). Moreover, participation in various activities and organizations by young people, beside the Erasmus Programme, has an impact on interest in politics and elections; on an Eurobarometer study conducted in 2013, 23% of the respondents admitted as more likely in being a candidate in a political election and 70% shared it was also likely for them to vote in the European elections of 2014 (Flash Eurobarometer 375 - European Youth: Participation in Democratic Life, 2013).

Undeniably, young European's lives have become more precarious due to low growth and cuts in public spending simply on the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, they appear to face a 'risk society', which is best illustrated by the uncertainty of the changing labour market and the unlikelihood of having a 'job for life' (Sloam, 2014). Regarding this, Erasmus students are more likely to identity the EU as 'a way to create a better future for young people', as well as 'a way to create jobs' and in general they tend to feel more optimistic about their future employment status (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014). Concerning political participation, the youth shows a tendency towards non-institutionalized forms of engagement, and even though voting is still the most common form of political participation, lower youth turnout in elections has become a concern for both policy-makers and scholars (Sloam, 2014). This is also a tendency with Erasmus participants, many admitted in 2019, participating in public debates, public demonstrations, signing petitions, and expressing their views on social media or in the web (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). On the other side, the capacity of representation of mainstream politics has diminished over time, and there has been a shift from politics to policy; young people's politics are more individualized and focused on single-issues, which has been a difficult adaptation for politics and political institutions faced with an ever more diverse electorate (Sloam, 2013). Indeed, in 2017 the most mentioned priority topics for the EU by the European youth were education and skills (53%), protection of the environment and the fight against climate change (50%), employment (42%) and the management of migratory flows and integration of refugees (40%) (Flash Eurobarometer 455 - European Youth, 2018).

To encourage greater public involvement in politics, "this worthy goal requires citizens who have the resources to participate and political and state actors who actively encourage" (ibid.: p.

853). On its part, EU has created tools and platforms to empower citizens to facilitate direct participation, such as the European Democracy Focus Area which tackles Digital Democracy, understanding populism and online disinformation (European Democracy, 2020). This goes accordingly with EU students' expectations with an exchange experience who seek more rights as EU citizensnd for schools to have more European civic education (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019).

Here is what we may say about mobile citizens in general in Europe, the exercise of it could be a way to legitimise the 'post-national' European project, which has been fuelled by "their fulfilment of the notion of freedom of movement" (Favell, 2010, p. 212). The engagement of mobile European citizens in other ways besides conventional politics could represent a new way of politics (ibid.). What has been seen as 'democratic deficit' of the EU could be a consequence of the nationalised past of Europe. According to Favell, a new way of political participation through active engagement as, for instance, residents and entrepreneurs, suggest that the traditional models to assess political engagement might be lacking a part of the whole view on the subject. With the evolution of European democracy and with it its increasingly international and mobile youth we must consider that a "multi-levelled, multi-scalar governance that might (still) be Europe's future." (ibid.: p. 213). Whatever happens, it is inevitable not to reflect on the role of this Erasmus Generation grown with airplane tickets in their hands, who tend to naturally feel European, and that will play a key role in Europe's future, one which is still on the making (Gozi, Generazione Erasmus al potere, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Young people were noticeably affected during the 2008 global financial crisis and this made a strong impression on them due to the stage they are in their life: concluding their education and entering the labour market (Grasso, 2018). In fact, Southern European countries were amongst the most affected by the crisis, together with the segmentation of the labour market, lack of aggregate demand and deficiency in vocational training, and countries such as Italy and Spain had staggering youth unemployment rates (Dolado J. J., 2015). These conditions induced young people to look for something different in political leadership, more transparency, direct democracy, and policies that supported the youth (Sloam, 2014). Yet during their studies, when young people are able to join the Erasmus Programme their views and political behaviour appear to distinguish them from their counterparts by their 'Erasmus experience', they are more inclined to feel positive about the future and the EU, also because they participated in the exchange programme they are more eager to vote on EU elections (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014).

When analysing the Erasmus Programme in both Italy and Spain in the first sections of chapters 2 and 3, we understood the increasing role the mobility programme played through time in both education systems with their students. In fact, Spain was amongst the first Member States to join Erasmus and has kept investing in it throughout time (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2010). Since then, Spanish universities have been investing in internationalisation, which leads to more support for outgoing students and boosting worldwide attractiveness of Spanish higher education institutions (Valle and Garrido, Movilidad de estudandiantes universitarios: es España atractivo para los estudiantes Erasmus?, 2009). As referred in Chapter 2, in 2018 it was assessed that less than 10% of higher education students joined international mobility programmes (Education and Training Monitor 2018 Spain, 2018). One of possible reasons for this low participation rate was the financial and economic crisis which affected particularly the lower-middle class, from where a considerable number of Erasmus students came from (Sánchez, 2015). Generally, Spanish students who go abroad develop skills that allow them to study and work in culturally diverse environments, they tend to feel more international and European and increase their opportunities to enter the labour market (Urquía-Grande and Campo, 2016).

Looking over now over the records of the Erasmus Programme in Italy presented in Chapter 3 since it kicked-off half a million Italian students have travelled in Europe with the mobility

programme (INDIRE, 2018). The higher education system in Italy is one of the most traditional in Europe, which appears not to create considerable incentives for student mobility compared to other partner countries, like Finland and Germany (Lindberg, 2009). Those students who join the Erasmus Programme interpret their time abroad as a 'rite of passage' (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2008). They also appear to develop a global identity, making them see themselves as European and world citizens (ibid). Moreover, the most recent version of the exchange programme Erasmus+ in Italy has created an 'added value' translated in the internationalization of the organizations involved in projects sponsored by the Programme (ANSA, 2019). Greater efficiency has also been partially achieved with the Erasmus+ in Italy, by making some aspects simpler with new digital solutions for project management (European Commission and the National Authorities). In line with this, Italian Erasmus graduates are more likely to work abroad, proving that their mobility period played a part in their achievements in the labour market (Pietro, Does studying abroad cause international labor mobility? Evidence from Italy, 2012).

Concerning youth political participation that were examined in the last section of chapters 2 and 3, we studied that Spain saw social unrest in 2011 as a reaction of its younger generation to the difficult period the global financial crisis (Jover, Belando-Montoro, and Guío, 2014). During this time, the NEET ("Not in education, employment or training") started to receive increased attention and by 2011 20% of Spanish citizens between the ages of 15 and 29 belonged to this group, also those with a university diploma increased their numbers in it by 69% (ibid.). Due to their negative assessment of their socio-economic context, young people between 18 and 24 years old used abstention in elections to show their discontent (ibid.). Indeed, according to the same source, young people are not actually indifferent to politics but feel outrage and distrust towards their political representatives. Moreover, support from Spanish youth for democracy and interest in politics tend to come as they grow older and even when they are young, they appear to be active participants in political discussions (García-Albacate, 2008). While in Italy, the economic crisis made many young people turn their vote for radical parties, such as the Five-Star Movement instability (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2014). These radical anti-establishment parties represented a political exit for many voters that chose to vote for them instead of abstaining (ibid.). Indeed, young Italians tend to be more interested in politics than their European counterparts, but this also comes with criticism of the practices of some members of the political establishment (Bontempi, 2008). In a similar trend as the Spanish youth, Italian youth's political participation has been shaped by the difficulties to enter the labour market (Baglioni, Colloca, and Theiss, 2015).

In the last chapter, we started by analysing how public attitudes over mass political behaviour have been responsible for shaping and building European integration (Gabel, 1998) and how this has also influenced Erasmus students attachment and support towards the EU (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). We moved forward by exploring how there has been an increasing detachment of young people from formal politics, this has created some concerns since their lack of political participation puts at risk the legitimacy of democratic systems (Grasso, 2018). In fact, some young people have turned for non-mainstream forms of political participation, such as protests (ibid.). According to Grasso, this was also shaped by the rise of digital technology and social media, allowing the youth to express its political views and participate in political environments. Concerning the Erasmus Programme's role in shaping the political action, the changing and different actors with multiple priorities who built it make the mobility programme a difficult object to evaluate (Wilson, 2011). It is felt some vagueness on what it is hoped to achieve through Erasmus (ibid). In general, education levels, ideological identification, and satisfaction with the way democracy works and other political values influence political involvement (Grasso, 2018).

Thus, on the Erasmus Programme and the political participation among young people in Spain and Italy we analysed a complex and still-evolving narrative. The global financial crisis might have pushed young people to political action expressed through protest movements, but these seem only to capture a small proportion of participants who are often ignored by mainstream politics since they are viewed as unlikely voters (Grasso, 2018). When analysing the existing data for Erasmus students on political participation there is a very specific reality, they are interested in EU elections and do vote in them, they also participate politically in other less conventional actions, such as protests, signing petitions and expressing political views on the web and social media (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Indeed, in the EU elections of 2014, the 81% of the respondents of the study EVA who had completed their stay abroad shared they had voted, while the total sum of youth participation that year was only of 30% (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014). In the EU elections of 2019 the same trend was noticed, those who had participated in an international exchange programme gave higher importance to these elections (60,69%), had greater intentions to vote in them (76,18%) and had greater voter turnout in comparison to other young people (71,20% in 2019) (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Generally, mainstream politics has been unable to represent this new, more diverse electorate; young people's politics have become more individualized and focused on single-issues (Sloam, 2013). An illustration of this was the youth reactions in Italy and Spain to the financial

crisis with anti-austerity protests which gained a wider audience during this period and greater mobilization (Zamponi and González, 2016). Thus, young people have been searching for a different direction in politics (Sloam, 2014) and this seeking could also be perceived in Erasmus participants who want more rights as EU citizens (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Only time and further research on the subject will reveal if with the freedom of movement and mobility, incentivised by exchange programmes like Erasmus, there will be a legitimisation of the 'post-national' European project (Favell, 2010). Moreover, political engagement in non-conventional forms could represent a signal for a new way of politics (ibid.).

The present research has attempted to shed light upon youth political participation and the Erasmus Programme by exploring the available data. This was made against the background of Erasmus's evolution in the education systems of both countries and the possible role the mobility programme could have played in the political behaviour of young people. Public attitudes over mass political behaviour have been responsible for shaping and building European integration (Gabel, 1998). This has also influenced Erasmus students' attachment and support towards the EU (Banet, Pinto, Japiashvili, Rousou, and Katava, 2019). Indeed, students who had the 'Erasmus experience' are more positive about the EU and have their participation in the exchange programme as the major factor influencing their voting behaviour in EU elections (Martínez, Renner, Gots, and Sousa, 2014).

Concerning on our potential contribution to the literature, we opened further venues for research and study on Erasmus youth political participation and public attitudes, since there have not been until now great concerns on the political behaviour of Erasmus participants. This could of course be related to what previous studies have pointed out that those who join the exchange programme already feel positive about the EU (Mol, 2018). Nonetheless, attempting to understand the Erasmus period's full influence in European youth's life might help us understand what the future for the European project could be. Indeed, with further evolution of European democracy and its ever-more international and mobile youth, it could be further explored the possibility of multi-levelled, multi-scalar governance for Europe's future (Favell, 2010).

Focusing now on avenues for future research, one of the possibilities could be to explore how European politics could capture the youth's attention effectively to vote and re-engage them in formal politics. Knowing what we have explored in this research: the particular political behaviour of European youth including those who join mobility programmes, such as Erasmus. Moreover, understanding that the youth has turned to non-conventional forms of politics and that public

attitudes contribute for the evolution of the European project, it could be interesting to understand the impact that these forms of political participation such as protests, have on the action of EU institutions. Finally, a third possible topic for future research could be understanding the political participation and action that is shown by Erasmus students. It could be explored what role Erasmus students play on domestic and European politics, also what potential contribution this specific group within the youth could make in expanding European integration. All in all, there are still vast possibilities to understand the phenomenon that is Erasmus simply on shaping public attitudes and political participation of those who join it.

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